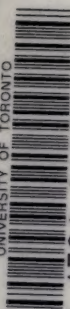


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THE ROMANCE OF A FAVOURITE

TO
MADAME ELISE LOLIÉE

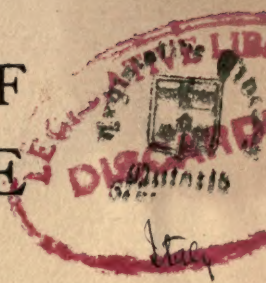




Countess de Castiglione.
from a portrait by Leraud.

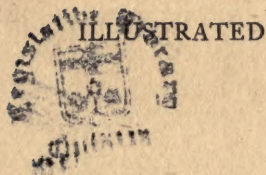
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THE ROMANCE OF A FAVOURITE



BY
FRÉDÉRIC LOLIÉE

TRANSLATED BY
WM. MORTON FULLERTON
AUTHOR OF "IN CAIRO," "PATRIOTISM AND SCIENCE," AND
"TERRES FRANÇAISES"



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P R E F A C E

NEVER perhaps have the two contrasted, yet sister, literary forms—history and the novel—been so happily blended in a theme susceptible of a treatment both documentary and romantic as in the life of the famous but little-known Madame de Castiglione. Surnamed the “Divine” because of her superhuman loveliness, Madame de Castiglione began her strange and radiant career of conquest as the secret emissary of Italy at the Court of the Tuileries; she speedily became the alleged “favourite” of Napoleon III.; she was, later on, the friend and counsellor of the princes of the House of Orleans; and she ended her days alone, far from the madding crowd, weary of the world and of everything in it.

It is impossible to exaggerate the ardent curiosity that was aroused by her varied, even fantastic, career. The very lack hitherto of any precise and really authentic details as to her life has been a natural, an inevitable, incentive to the imagination of the concocters of legend. The chameleonic aspects of this mysterious creature recall at one moment the tumultuous Clorinde of Émile Zola; at another, the ambiguous figure of Gilbert-Augustin Thierry's Savelli; and yet again, as we behold her at the extreme limit of her career, the ghostly Rospiglieri of Henri de Regnier. The years have gone by, but she has still her poets, her adorers, who do

more than celebrate her memory, who continue to render her ecstatic homage.

Few destinies, in fact, were ever richer in contrasted experiences. The gods had granted her an extraordinary physical beauty, and at the same time an intelligence and ambition which she had every right to suppose would entail for her results less illusory than those that in reality befell her. At one moment her life was a romantically wild adventure, smacking at times of a kind of Boccacian naturalism; at another it was a series of all but tragical episodes, with aspects of moral and physical distress that were disconcerting; while over the whole extended, like a deep shadow, a continual mystery.

What in reality was known about her until now? Exceedingly little: certain vague and unco-ordinated echoes, the reflected rumours of her sensational apparitions at the Court of the Tuileries; a few crumbs of anecdote which had been picked up without effort or method; certain insinuations possessing no guarantee of authenticity; uncircumstantial details of her alleged *liaisons*; a few vague data with regard to her diplomatic journeyings between France and Italy; and, finally, certain scattered indications as to her voluntary seclusion in her gloomy lodgings of the Place Vendôme and the Café Voisin.

That was all.

The world had utterly forgotten that when Napoleon III. fell, she who had triumphed during the bright days of the Second Empire, was still under thirty years of age; that she still looked upon herself as a beautiful woman; that she had not yet said definitive good-bye to the admiration of men, to the world, or to politics; that there was still ahead of her a second phase of her exist-

ence which was to be illuminated with other hopes and illusions constantly renewed ; that up to 1877, although living in semi-seclusion, she was an active participant in events, and no mere detached observer of them ; and that, finally, her failures and rebuffs at this period of her life, far more than her regret at growing old, were the cause, the real cause, of the strange self-sequestration in which this somewhat vain and showy spirit at last took refuge, up to the supreme moment when she vanished altogether.

How happened it that a social star of such magnitude failed to leave behind it less fugitive traces of its dazzling splendour ? Parisians who knew anything knew much of the multiple peculiarities and caprices of the Countess de Castiglione. They failed utterly to penetrate her secret or to discover the real motives of her unceasingly alert activity.

This ignorance, however, was not due to lack of sustained curiosity.

During her lifetime she had greatly absorbed the attention of the world. After her death fresh questions were put in regard to her, and curiosity was singularly whetted when it became known that the Italian Government, dreading possible indiscretions, had put under official seal the private papers of the deceased. "Waldeck Rousseau," said, at the time, one of the attachés of the Italian Embassy in Paris, "may prefer any objections he may like. This correspondence touches upon affairs that interest the Italian State and directly concern our diplomacy. We shall never give these papers up." The heirs put in their claims. Legal action was begun. It was all in vain. The representatives of the Kingdom of Italy won their case, and the few papers that had escaped systematic destruction

by the Countess—after a double burglary committed in her rooms shortly before her death—were confiscated by order of the Courts.

All this mass of more or less tell-tale notes, these scraps of documents bearing the signatures of princes and of others, suffered the fate which had already befallen a quantity of pages which had previously been burned. Inquisitive investigators found nothing but ashes, or perchance a few account-books kept in common with her maid (her former nurse, Luisa Corsi), some unimportant legal documents, and meaningless and insignificant bits of writing. Some two or three months later the jewels, lace, and pictures were put on public exhibition and sold at auction. The work of dispersion appeared to have been consummated. The memory of the Countess de Castiglione seemed to have definitively vanished.

Towards the end of 1901 there was a revival of hope in the hearts of those who had not forgotten the Countess. Were they at last to be vouchsafed the revelations for which they had yearned? On December 24th or 25th, the local police at Spezia arrested an adventuress by the name of Vergazzola, who had been a former lady's-maid of the Countess. What was said to be a precious batch of papers was found in her possession. They were letters, it was affirmed, bearing the signatures of Napoleon III., Victor-Emmanuel, Cavour, Queen Augusta of Prussia, and the Grand Duchess Stéphanie. What is more certain is that in the effects of the woman Vergazzola were found an ivory crucifix of exquisite workmanship, some very beautiful cut-glass, and some delicately chiselled silver vases, and that the origin of all these objects was obvious. At all events the woman in question was prosecuted on the charge

of larceny; her accomplices were discovered, and for some time the affair aroused much talk. Then the name of Madame de Castiglione, which had been mixed up with this business, once more fell into oblivion. There were no further allusions to the above-mentioned secret papers, the number and importance of which had been exaggerated by the journalists.

Happily, however, not every written sign of her earthly passage had been lost.

A certain number of her French friends: Léon Cléry, the Duke of Vallombrosa, Louis Estancelin—above all, Estancelin, who had been literally besieged daily with her confidences—still preserved multiple missives bearing witness to her epistolary verve.

It would not have been difficult, furthermore, to discover that in a certain nook and corner of Spezia there had existed a collection of family archives. The wind of hazard had swept together into one of the abandoned properties of the Oldoini certain documentary shreds of the Countess's wandering, undisciplined existence. Some political letters, and some love-letters, even, with their replies, had for a time been kept there. An Italian scholar, the librarian of Spezia, Signor Ubaldo Mazzini, even remembered having held them in his hand. He had examined them with curiosity, and it was his wish to communicate these documents to me for the present study. In that generous intention he undertook one morning, in December 1911, a fresh pilgrimage to this remote domain. He found once more the empty house falling into decay, with its moss-grown cornice and its wildly tangled garden. It was evident that since his last visit the sole occupants of the place had been the rain,

vermin, and *ladroni*. The interesting relics, alas, had disappeared, no one knew how or whither.

To both my Italian friend and myself the disappointment was great.

But compensations were in store for me. A mass of documents more important than any which I had dreamed of obtaining from Spezia were destined to supplement those which I had already personally gathered together. There had been kept, stored away in a Norman château, a priceless set of letters and notes covering a period of forty years. I had gone thither for the first time in 1905, and I enjoyed there the cordial hospitality, and the abundant flow of personal recollections extending over a period of half a century, of the most devoted and the most cherished friend of the Countess de Castiglione, Louis Estancelin. He was then more than eighty years of age. But he was still, what he had always been, a brilliant talker, a delightful companion. He readily recalled the peculiarities or the characteristics of the personages he had known. He had preserved many an utterance, many details, which might have been supposed to have been irretrievably lost. But the central theme of his entire conversation was *she*, invariably *she*, the Unique.

Six years later I found myself once again going down the fine avenue of oaks and beeches leading to the château of Baromesnil. It was a brilliant day in the late autumn, and the Norman country wore a high gloss of autumnal splendour. I saw again beyond the park the broad green lawn where, on that radiant day in 1882, had assembled, beneath the tent erected for the banquet given in honour of the marriage of Mlle. Estancelin and the Comte de Clercy, almost all the princes and princesses of the House of France.

During several days I slept in the General's own bedroom, the room which had been occupied in 1848 by the Duchess de Montpensier when flying before the Revolution. Alas! I had no longer the joy of finding in his hospitable drawing-room, and in his attractive library, the friend I had lost. But I received the same cordial greeting from the new master of the house, and the same kindly consideration. With a rare liberality Comte Vivien de Clercy—the last descendant of one of the oldest families in France, one of whose ancestors, owing to his conduct at the battle of Bouvines, had been granted the right to carry in his arms a "Lily of France," and whose father had been godson of the Comte de Chambord—opened to me wide his archives. "Examine, choose, take what you like," said to me amiably the lord of Baromesnil and Derchigny. It was a treasure-house of historical correspondence which had been laboriously amassed by Estancelin, the faithful champion of the Orleanist princes. And, hard by the magnificently bound voluminous registers, with their silver clasps, overflowing with thousands of autograph manuscripts of the Comte de Paris, the Duke d'Aumale, Robert d'Orléans, and the Montpensiers, were arranged, in their special corner, from 1500 to 1600 of Madame de Castiglione's letters, addressed to the distant companion with whom it really might have been said that she had contracted a *mariage d'amitié*.

Forty years of epistolary effusions, in which day by day she had prodigally poured out, as if to provide the elements of a future volume, her recollections of her youth, the notable circumstances connected with her social triumphs or her secret intervention in the foreign policy of the Second Empire, her speedy disillusionment amid a life of scepticism and pleasure, her im-

pressions of the Court, the reawakening of her sterile activity, her opinion on the Princes whom she had known too intimately to cherish in regard to them any illusions—finally, the whole mad series of dreams that haunted her brain during the final period.

From these hundreds and hundreds of letters, coupled with those belonging to me personally, from this mass of confused, undated correspondence, which is in many places almost illegible, but out of which leaped forth constantly and unexpectedly the most characteristic and suggestive traits, I have composed—and, as it were, line by line—the history of an extraordinary life, which might never have had its historian.

There was the risk that, too enamoured of the model, I might be tempted to construct a pedestal too large for the statue.

I was aware of this peril, and in order to avoid it it has been my constant effort never completely to lose touch with the famous personages in the immediate vicinity, who, because of their distinction, their social rank, their reputation, or their individual worth, enhanced the interest and the significance of the action of the Countess. There was no better way of keeping perspectives true in dealing with her rôle—a rôle more agitated than really effective—while at the same time depicting her faithfully to the life, as she in reality was, a strangely beautiful, pre-eminently intelligent, woman; but a woman excessively lacking in right reason, and altogether singular and exceptional.

My concern for truth has not allowed me, as I have descended the slope of her declining years, to shirk the responsibility of giving exact details, distressing and strange as they are, of her melancholy end. The sombre, tragic atmosphere of those years helps to

account for her erratic temperament, her deranged intelligence; and to explain her isolation, her chill and hardened heart, and the premature physical break-up.

But the marvellous creature she had been in better days will stand out with all the greater precision and originality against the sombre background of those years. The clouds of legend with which her memory had been enswathed by the irresponsible evocations of certain chroniclers will thus have been dissipated. We shall behold Madame de Castiglione at last in the crude light of history. The private pages which had been the object of so many an anxious search, and the discovery of which no one any longer supposed to be possible, we shall have held them in our hands. They will have enabled us to depict, in her exact traits and in her true colours—ranging from the most brilliantly romantic hues to the drab negations of her sombre end,—the real character of this mysterious figure, who possessed beauty but knew not love, who was fired by lofty ambitions but reaped no reward, and who had a glorious existence but an unhappy life.

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UNDER her mild blue sky, Florence of the Flowers woke to a morning that breathed all the graces of the spring. Already beneath the young foliage of the Cascine early promenaders were abroad, acquaintances greeting each other with smiles and bows, when suddenly every eye was simultaneously drawn to the same charming apparition.

It was a young girl who had just left a carriage, which was slowly following her; and as she moved forward it was a pleasure and wonder to note the harmony between the lines of her figure and her fresh and simple dress. By her walk, by the pose of her head, you felt how completely self-possessed she already was, how she rejoiced in her beauty, her youth and her

wealth, how proud she was of belonging to Italy, and above all, to Florence.¹

Stepping lightly yet firmly, she skirted the wide stretches of green sward with their groups of trees. So pure was the outline of her features; so brilliant were her almond-shaped blue eyes; her complexion was of such exquisite delicacy; her face wore an expression so fascinating, and her whole bearing was so ideally perfect, that a flattering murmur followed her: there was no one to match Nina Oldorni.

And in the evening, in her box at La Pergola, with crimson flowers adorning her dusky gold hair, she would appear even more radiant still, and of a charm no less seductive.

Such, in the dawn of her youth, was she who was to be known as "the divine Castiglione"—the intimate friend of kings, the secret agent, at the Court of the Tuileries, of the ambitious schemes of the great Piedmontese minister, Cavour; and, after the fall of the Empire, an Egeria, too little heeded, to the Princes of the House of Orleans.

The mystery that surrounds this famous yet virtually unknown woman begins with her very birth. Mists envelop her cradle. Nor did she herself, even when she might have done so, ever seek to dissipate them. Doubtless she preferred to leave matters as they were; for, after her first youth, almost wantonly she deepened the mystery: not only in her most intimate conversations with her friends, echoes of which have reached me, but also in certain of her letters that have been communicated to me. In accordance with her

¹ The young Marquise Virginia had, however, been born in Florence by accident (*sole per caso*, as M. Ubaldo Mazzini writes me), her family at that time living in Spezia.

changing mood her versions of her origin vary. At one time she would not suffer the slightest insinuation affecting her mother's good name; and on such occasions she made merry over the numerous guesses as to her origin. Had she not, in turn, been made a descendant of the Florentine Napoleons,¹ of the Grand-dukes of Tuscany, of the House of Savoy—nay, indeed, of his Eminence, Cardinal Antonelli? "Why not of the Pope?" she added disrespectfully. At another time, with complete indifference to the possible consequences of such allegations, she would declare that she knew nothing certain as to the places that had had the honour of giving her birth, and that she would have been exceedingly embarrassed if called upon to affirm on oath, *where*, and *by whom*. Of her father, the Marquis Oldoni, she frequently spoke; nevertheless, in her soul's hidden places, she reserved the best of her filial affections for a certain cherished prince of royal lineage, by birth a Pole, and on this interesting subject her recollections appeared to be very definite.

"March! Ah, that's my month! And it's the month of Joseph, the last King² of Poland (my father!), the only being who really loved me, and whose secret I've never betrayed. Have you never observed, indeed, that I must have some royal blood, one drop perhaps, in my veins?"

Concerning the date, nothing could be less positive than her own testimony. According to d'Ideville, she was born in 1840, but according to her own account, not till 1843, while the certificate of birth gives the date

¹ Namely of those Napoleons who at that period lived in Florence.

² This was a king without a kingdom, for the allusion is evidently to Joseph Poniatowski, who was attached to the Court of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, from whom he had received the title of Prince di Monte-Rotundo.

4 THE ROMANCE OF A FAVOURITE

as March 22, 1835.¹ She was a real woman, and it cost her little to juggle with dates: she resolutely adopted that of 1843, a quite incorrect date, when one remembers that she was fourteen years old at the time of her marriage. This marriage took place in 1855, so that in accepting the year 1843 as that of her birth, one must concede her to have been united to the Count de Castiglione at eleven or twelve, the age of her first communion. But a slight error mattered little to her when doing her accounts, and precise facts were not her strong point when telling a tale.

In reality she belonged to a Spezian family of the old Genoese nobility. She bore the name, and was the daughter, of the Marquis Philip Oldoini. In 1848, in the royal Sardinian Parliament, Oldoini was the first member for Spezia, and later he became the Italian Ambassador at Lisbon. Thus his daughter's first steps were taken in a very real palace. The maiden name of her mother was Lamporecchi, and she had begun her life in the elegant and pagan city which is called the daughter of Rome. Like all of her race, she was of an indolent and languid temperament, unmethodical, and wanting in initiative. Moreover, the Marquise Oldoini's health was delicate, and in matters pertaining to the general management of her house and the education of her family, her energy failed her. Her taste was for a simple life with no responsibility. She had great natural charm, grace, and elegance, and in spite of her calm exterior she loved to surround herself with the

¹ "An evil chance brought me into this world at the moment that a shooting star passed over my cradle. . . . They are selling that cursed cradle at auction, together with my late village, where, moreover, I was not born (not in 1840, but 1843). It was elsewhere, in secret, I do not know where, nor exactly of whom. The certificate of my birth has never been produced, not even for my marriage."—*Private Letters*, cclxvii.

pleasures of the world, and with the good company which Florence has always enticingly offered. Is there any place on earth, not even excepting Venice and Paris, where the business of living is more amiably conducted than amid the exclusive society of the Médicean city? Where is there a richer, more propitious soil for the development of gentle manners or of refined and delicate perceptions?

The Marquis travelled much, both on his diplomatic missions and for his personal recreation, while the Marquise divided her days between the care of her health and the pleasures of society, which she enjoyed without feverish agitation. In her a superficial education was combined with an incapacity for sustained reflection or attention, and although she observed how rare an intelligence was developing in her daughter, she felt little concern to stimulate the child's mind or to discipline her whims. Moreover, why should she worry to take more pains? Neither her own feeling nor any traditions in her environment urged her to do so, nor was it the custom among her compatriots to be unduly occupied with one's children, and concerned as to their intimate companions. On the banks of the Arno there had so long flourished that fine epicurean detachment which makes it life's prime object to occupy one's means and leisure, as far as one can, in the agreeable task of driving away dull care by mere embellishment of the fleeting hours!

Virginicchia¹ Oldoini's education naturally suffered from the effects of her careless upbringing, the only systematic part of which consisted in the prompt and complete gratification of her every whim. Nor did any

¹ In her infancy she was called by the diminutive "Nicchia," and she kept this name to the end of her life.

6 THE ROMANCE OF A FAVOURITE

perceptible change take place when this rather troublesome duty was entrusted to her grandfather Lamporecchi, the celebrated jurisconsult. There she was nourished on the same flattery as in her parents' house, although long afterwards she used to say that the years spent in the dreary Oldoini Palace had left her only dismal memories.¹

As a little child she had transitory impulses toward piety, and on Catholic fête days it was her delight to watch the processions from the upper windows of the palace. On such occasions it was customary to fill the rooms with hampers of wild flowers. In a burst of joy she plunged her arms into them, and then threw the flowers by handfuls on the crowd below. She always recalled a certain morning of the Corpus Christi when, in a transport of enthusiasm, she had showered the canopy that protected the Madonna so abundantly with daisies and buttercups, as seriously to disturb the procession and to cause a kind of panic among the attendants. The household pretended to be seriously vexed at such giddiness; and by way of keeping her quiet for a while, at least, her arms were attached to her little chair. This curb on her vivacity did not make her cry; but in a second, forgetting her petty troubles, forgetting the family and even the incident, she had a vision of herself all alone, smiling at the sun, at the blueness above, and at the falling of the flowers. However, on coming to herself out of this childish ecstasy, her happiness was sobered by learning that she was to be punished for having disturbed the procession, and that she was to be put on a diet of only bread and water. Such was her early martyrdom: once in her life, at all events, she suffered for the violence and sincerity of her faith.

¹ "Throughout my childhood there was no happiness for me in that foredoomed and gloomy palace."—*Countess de Castiglione, Private Letters*, xxxiv.

As her grandfather and the Oldoini family had relations with the best people in and near Florence, she was brought into contact at an early age with foreign as well as native society. A part of the exiled Bonaparte family occupied the Lamporecchi palace, and the older members would dandle her on their knees and call her by her pet name: Nini. Lamporecchi had been the guardian of Prince Louis, afterwards Napoleon III., and at this period she saw the Prince whenever he made one of his rare and furtive appearances. Affectionately and tenderly he would take her up in his arms and tell her that she was the most captivating little girl in the world. And many a time also, when the Prince de Joinville honoured her parents' house by his presence, he took delight in fondling her golden curls. When, in his diplomatic capacity, Lord Holland was in Florence, Lady Holland knew the child well, and was extremely fond of her, calling her "Darling beauty." The Hollands were amazed at her almost miraculous aptitude for languages, and frequently recalled their surprise at hearing her speak English with an almost faultless purity; her pretty mouth had attained this facility of pronunciation after but a few weeks' study with them!

This was, indeed, one of the most characteristic natural gifts of her intelligence, her auditive memory. In the prime of her life, when she travelled widely on the Continent, she could unfailingly and with ease translate her thoughts into the idiom of whatever country she might at the moment be visiting. She studied without method, and nothing could have been more discursive than her reading; but when other girls and boys were playing the games suited to their age, she preferred the calm enjoyment of a novel, preferably a

romantic tale, or a period of imaginative and precocious meditation. An extraordinary emotion shook her young spirit when chance placed in her hands the legend of *Ildegonsa*.¹ This was the tragic adventure of a nun, who was consumed by an earthly flame more ardent than all the transports of the love Divine. Yielding to this irresistible force, she flees from the convent; but implacable Heaven, or rather the too inhuman worshippers of God, keep watch over the fugitive, and just as she is about to seek help and protection in her lover's arms, a mysterious force nails her to the spot as if paralysed. The miserable creature is seized by cruel hands and delivered to the stake, to be made a byword and an example. Nothing was lacking in the tale to capture and over-excite a young imagination—passionate love, faith, religious exaltation, horror, the supernatural, all the elements of romantic suggestion.

Meanwhile, Virginia's physical growth kept pace with the rapid and precocious development of her heart and mind. At the age of twelve she was as tall and beautiful as she was at twenty; the grace of her figure was preparing to flower, nor did she lack the instinct of coquetry. She received attention at a very tender age. A retinue of passionate admirers formed her train, and already the most sought after of her countrywomen were becoming jealous of this little Marquise when she was hardly out of her frocks. It was Nicchia's unusual beauty that wooed hosts of visitors to the house of the Oldoini, whether they were living in Florence or Spezia. At Spezia naval officers of every nationality were the chief guests. Always unusual in her tastes, Virginia liked to enhance her charms by using the warm but plain

¹ The private and unpublished correspondence of the Countess de Castiglione (Letter clxxx).

shades of violet. Many an evening brought a circle of admirers around her dress of amethyst or lavender; and happy the man to whom occasion offered the rare chance of a moment alone in which to pay his court. She herself has noted the blunt expressive frankness of these naval officers in complimenting her on her attractions and on the harmony of her attire, all the details of which they seemed to find interesting. It gave them pleasure to come near, to examine, almost to touch. Her mother, however, restrained their ardour. She whose sight had grown feeble at a very early age seemed to be instinctively aware of these gallant manœuvres on the part of her daughter's suitors.¹

"Don't touch the Countess," she said to them; "I can't see, but I *feel* clearly when she's in violet. All of you, gentlemen, will only set fire to your stripes: all of you, from the candidates and the aspirants to those who are out of the running." This was her original classification of the young lieutenants, the mature captains, and the old admirals who were rivalling with each other in sweet speeches addressed to her daughter. As a matter of fact, the Marquise Oldoïni believed that colours influenced the feelings, just as she believed in the happy or baneful effect of certain jewels when offered before marriage or the day after. No more fervent or more shuddering believer in the evil eye could be found than she; and she would have deserved to have its sorcery turned into a reality, if only to justify and compensate her for the masses and propitiatory sacrifices of which she was so lavish, in her relentless warfare with the *jettatura*. To what extremes her superstition carried

¹ "One vied with the other around this warm colour: a difficult one for a youthful complexion, but which still suits me now that I am older, and which still has the faculty of exciting the passion of the fools and the wise."—*Private Correspondence of the Countess de Castiglione*, xci.

her was shown during her daughter's engagement. The first presents to arrive were a diamond cross and a necklace of pearls of the size of a hazel-nut. Attributing to these jewels a fatal influence on her Nina's future, she did not hesitate to throw them into the sea ; and a handsome prayer-book, bound in ivory, nearly met with the same fate, because it had been presented on an inauspicious day.

Thus, almost from childhood, Virginia Oldoini was the fashion, an object of admiration and desire. As she grew up she kept the frank look of the child, never fancying it necessary to lower her lids, as other girls of her age were brought up to do. Before her fifteenth year she had followed, with her large limpid eyes, the unfolding of many a tender sentiment leading to marriage among her young friends. It was natural for her to seek happiness in the same direction, and to heed the accents of love that she heard in low whispers when walking abroad and in the warm atmosphere of social gatherings. In her own case it was the Count de Castiglione who first spoke of love, offering to teach her its language, and he approached her with her mother's consent.

He was a young man of easy manners and bearing, pleased with his condition and with the names he bore,¹ a youth who had not yet been obliged to wrestle with life's difficulties. Though only twenty-six years old, he was already a widower, but he had been distracted from this early sorrow by the pleasures of court life at Turin and London, and he was now awaiting the ideal passion, a marriage all for love with a woman who really pleased him, and with whom he could begin life afresh. In an earlier volume on *The Women of the Second Empire*,

¹ Francesco Verasis conte di Castiglione di Castiglione d'Asti.

I had occasion to relate at length the circumstances in which he was granted the hand of Virginia Oldoini, and I can only recall at present certain essential details exactly as I had them from Madame Walewska, as she recalled the days that had gone.

It was in London during the winter of 1854. The Duchess of Inverness, a relative of the Queen, was giving a reception. Conspicuous among those present were Count Walewski, Napoleon III.'s ambassador, and the Italian minister Emmanuel d'Azeglio. Beside them, among the guests in black coats, might have been noticed a stranger of good looks and agreeable carriage. It was the Count de Castiglione. There had been dancing, and the glances of the gentleman from Turin rested with pleasure on the many *décolletées* women present. Suddenly he turned to Count Walewski with a confiding air, and said in a low voice: "You did not know the real reason for my coming to London. I have come to find a wife."

"My dear Castiglione," replied the ambassador, "if that is the case, you shouldn't have left Italy. Let me advise you to return to Florence, or at all events to Spezia. Get yourself introduced to the Marquise Oldoini by your eminent friend Cavour. Make yourself agreeable to her daughter, marry her, and you will have the prettiest wife in Europe."

This union offered, moreover, certain prospective advantages which were not to be disdained: it might bring to the Count, who already enjoyed a high position near royalty, the support of a fine connection. He therefore presented himself to the Marquise. He could not help seeing at once, by the coldness of the young Countess, that he did not produce the effect he expected. His name and birth left nothing to be desired,

and he had the freshness and that air of being enchanted with life and love which generally distinguish the Italians; but the spirit of Virginia Oldoini was not to be tamed merely by love ditties. Francesco Verasis de Castiglione possessed all the qualities of a *parfait galant homme*. To her he was gentle and obliging; he manifested a constant desire for her affection. But he was wanting in the one superior attraction which the intelligent woman hopes to find in her husband, and without which passionate love is an impossibility. He lacked the force of character, the energy of will, the enterprising initiative which the young Countess desired in the man of her choice: the qualities which would have spurred her to become his worthy companion in an ambitious and active career—for her thoughts were even then occupied with such a life. Francesco Verasis de Castiglione was not the man for whom she had been waiting; she had been dreaming of *another*. She had warned him of this immediately, in the plainest language, but he had temporarily convinced her against her real self. Their natures were too opposed ever to melt into one; he was exposing himself to certain disillusion; she had no real inclination for him, barely a vague sympathy; she besought him to love another. But with the help of time he hoped to arouse a more genuine sentiment of affection in this rebellious soul, and to dominate what he looked upon as a mere passing caprice or affectation of coquetry. He would not forego his dream or succumb to discouragement. Whatever might be the consequences, he would always be sure, in marrying Virginia, of possessing the pearl of Italy and the most beautiful woman of his time.

There was no help for it, then! Virginia was

married without being given the opportunity to contract a union of love. She yielded because she was inert; she let herself be led to sacrifice in a fine carriage and in gala dress. The marriage ceremony was magnificent, but the absence of the Marquis Oldoini caused great surprise. He remained in Portugal and refrained from attending the wedding, as if, too well informed as to certain slanders, he was not quite sure that he was giving his own daughter in marriage.

The Count settled down with his young wife in a castle near Turin, where he surrounded her with every luxury. Certainly she had reason to be happy and proud when first she crossed the threshold of her spacious apartments that were decorated in the most refined taste. The palace in which she was now to live had not been built of imaginary materials. The interior offered her the warm luxurious intimacy of Oriental carpets with designs from the garden of dreams; loose curtains of shimmering silk, hangings of Genoese damask, exquisite furniture. A bed worthy of a favourite was ready to receive her young beauty. There were Florentine marbles and the clear and iridescent glass of Venice; precious specimens of Eastern art; and, adding to the charm, on every hand a great wealth of flowers rose gracefully above handsome vases. She was encompassed by things of beauty, and at her elbow was some one to repeat twenty times a day that she adorned them all. In her father's house there had been difficult hours; now she was floating in an atmosphere of opulence which, though it might prove evanescent, had really been produced for her.

Long afterwards, years after the separation from her husband and after his death by an accident, there remained to her, of all the luxury of her early marriage,

a gold and purple bed, which she preserved to the last in her unused palace at Spezia as a relic of love. Forty years later she still mentioned it in her letters, though under less radiant surroundings. For the lawyers were threatening to sell the precious object (together with many another one). This occurred during one of the crises in the dark days of her decline, against which we shall see her struggling.¹

But it was still the year 1855. After the wedding came plans of travel and of visits to be paid, and the young pair began with the latter, in the order of visits preferred, visits of courtesy and obligatory visits. Among the last must be placed that to her mother-in-law, the Countess Verasis-Castiglione, a visit which she ought to have paid weeks before, and from which she had escaped by some subterfuge that she had invented on the way. A story in regard to this visit, from the pen of a French-woman, made the rounds, being accepted and repeated by everybody without scruple, but it turned out to be untrue in every particular and made entirely out of whole cloth. Alas! the Count's mother had no occasion to exact the fulfilment of a duty from her daughter-in-law, since she had departed this life before her son's second marriage. It is clear that not a shred of the story remains: neither the manœuvres of the husband to determine his wife; nor the mute resistance of Virginicchia; nor the piquant touch of her shoes thrown into the river from the carriage while crossing a bridge; nor yet the reason given for this act of rebellion, namely, that she should not be obliged to mount the steps of a dwelling which

¹ "To-day the sheriff and law-officers were to sell my family furniture, my cradle, and even my gold and purple marriage-bed."—*Correspondence of Madame de Castiglione, letter ccxxii.*

she did not want to enter. All this is pure fiction, and in other days we shall find Madame de Castiglione complaining of it most bitterly.¹ At this time, however, she had no feelings of bitterness or acrimony; the wedding journey had begun under the best possible conditions, on the very soil of Italy. The Count spared nothing—indeed, he even jeopardised his fortune—to give his cold goddess, whose steps he as the triumphant husband was guiding, as many delightfully varied impressions as possible. They visited the cities of art and pleasure, and with a languid and absent air she wandered through those long galleries where the marvels of form and colour throb with an enduring beauty. While at Venice she had her palace on the Grand Canal, with time enough to enjoy it, but not enough to suffer from its monotony. In the shelter of her gondola, gliding in silence over the sleepy and waveless water, she also had her vision of Venice—when it was still the real Venice. Her thoughts pursued a dream that had no ending, and in the twilight she listened to their echoes, while the chimes were tossing their joyous notes back and forth to each other over the lagoon. Later, when autumn pours out all her treasures on the Italian lakes, the Count did not fail to take her around that incomparable cove of the Lago Maggiore,² where Pallanza, Stresa, the Borromean Isles mirror their lines, a divine world of langour, where

¹ And maliciously, too: "Where did this writer see me throwing my shoes out of the carriage-window? It would serve her right if I were to say of her what you have not mentioned: that she threw her night-cap over the imperial roof. But I don't want to inflict the pain of it on that distressed Empress whom I see every year at the Tuileries."—*Correspondence of Madame de Castiglione, letter xxvii.*

² "How good is God," wrote the Chevalier Massimo d'Azeglio, while reposing at his villa Canero in the tranquil enjoyment of his retirement from the ministry—"how good is God in that he created the Lago Maggiore!"

the most subtle sensations are bathed in an endless rapture. Part of the Countess's *dot* consisted of a villa on one of the terraces of Isola Bella.¹ It was not very large, but most advantageously situated among the beautiful slopes. Verasis-Castiglione took delight in climbing with Virginia amid these flowering tiers, which the hand of nature and the science of man had combined to set around this quarter of the lake with so picturesque and voluptuous a charm. Accustomed though she was from her birth to the soft Italian climate, still the witchery of these scenes held her entranced; and there were besides, as a diversion for her young imagination, the crowds of visitors, who regularly hie thither from all parts of the globe, in order to taste the gentle or ardent seductions of the spot. Sometimes her soul slumbered, but she awoke only the more desirable, more fascinating. So it seemed to her husband, who in her presence was all oblivious to the charms of the place. She responded to his transports of passion with an air of indifference and fatigue; but loving her desperately with all his heart and senses, he refused to admit this to himself. Not a day but he created new pleasures for her. It was a beautiful game, but a game that cost him dear. He played it *en grand seigneur*, and he was more than half ruined. He, however, was the last to complain. He was spending his last ducat, but he had obtained the rare satisfaction of possessing, showing off, adorning, as he loved to call her, "the pearl of Italian beauties."

They returned to Turin in time for the round of winter entertainments. The Count's place in the royal household had been kept for him; moreover, Victor-

¹ In one of her most interesting letters concerning her property in Italy I have found the details relating to this villa.

Emmanuel had a great affection for the daughter of the Oldoïni, treating her like one of his own children. She was welcomed like a queen. The marriage of the Duke of Genoa had just taken place, but the King's sister-in-law was easily put into the shade by the Countess; and as in her native city, so in Piedmont, she won the homage and admiration of every one. The royal princesses showed her every mark of kindness, the ladies of Turin submitted to her radiant superiority; in short, it was the general opinion that she was without a peer.

Victor-Emmanuel, according to Sir Charles Greville,¹ resembled rather a chief of the Heruli or of the ancient Lombards than a modern Italian prince. Of dissolute morals, eccentric in manner, without refinement in conversation, he had greatly reduced the number of court entertainments, and he detested all etiquette to such a degree that in order to escape it he would flee to the mountains. Military exercises and hunting were deemed by him infinitely preferable to social frivolities, and the consequence was that the Court of Turin offered very few facilities to Madame de Castiglione for displaying her all-conquering charms; nevertheless, she still found frequent opportunities to justify the rumours of her rare perfection.

At the same time her intelligence, her power of assimilation, suggested to her successes less fleeting on a nobler stage. Lofty aspirations were fermenting in the soul of Italy, and, young though the Countess was, she claimed her part in them. Being so close to the King and his minister, she could not be ignorant of the great designs which they both unceasingly pursued. She had a very clear idea that the planning of balls and

¹ *The Greville Memoirs*, iii. p. 308.

festivals was the least of their concerns, and that her cousin Camillo Cavour was making preparations for a concert, the music of which was to produce a very different harmony.

It was the time when Young Italy, at home and abroad, was beginning to attract unexpected attention. Its apostles were eloquent with generous hopes. By the productions of their pens, the frozen tirades of Gioberti (he who had been the prophet of the Idea) were infused with heat; while Mazzini, the agitator, foretold, as one inspired, that the approaching violent but inevitable tempest would be succeeded by a period fertile in peace, in renewed strength, in freedom. Every manifestation of contemporary thought gave utterance to this longing.

Italy was still only the fraction of a fraction of a nation: there was no true country of Italy, united, coherent, and powerful. There were several States, to be sure, in the Peninsula, living their own separate life: the kingdom of Sardinia and that of the two Sicilies; the duchies of Modena and Parma, the grand-duchy of Tuscany, and the States of the Church. Lombardy and Venetia were groaning under the yoke of Austria. The kingdom of Sardinia, consisting of the island proper of Sardinia, of the ancient republic of Genoa, of Nice, Savoy, and Piedmont, was nothing more than a political expression.¹ Yet all these divisions of the nation, so arbitrarily sundered, had but the one desire, to be again joined together. Let spontaneous and energetic help come from outside, and the dream of Italian unity, which had never been given up, would at last be realised. What really mattered was to obtain such active and efficient help.

¹ Louis Teste.

An ingenious idea came to Cavour for advancing the chances of his secret negotiations: he resolved to play an unexpected card. A woman's beauty was to serve both as an attraction and a stimulant; the beauty of a clever woman would, at the right moment, know how to plead the great cause. A woman might be made to subserve the political ends of her country with all the might of the love which her charms must inspire; in short, by using her personal influence with a sovereign who was known to be sensitive and sensual.

Through his kinship with the Oldorni and Castiglione families, Cavour knew the seductive Countess well, and appreciated her intellectual and moral qualities. She combined flexibility with a capacity to rule, and he recognised in her an excellent auxiliary for the success of his diplomatic schemes. He directed her to go to France, to shine at the Court of Napoleon, to use all her cleverness in securing a position there, to persevere in keeping that position, and little by little to determine the Emperor to take those decisive steps on which their hopes were built. This was the part for her to play; the choice of means remained with her.¹

Neither the minister nor the King had thought it well to consult Monsieur de Castiglione on so delicate a point. Before deciding to go to France, the Countess herself had not considered it necessary to subject her natural independence to such a conjugal measure. She simply said to herself that she would take with her the man whose name she had so thoughtlessly accepted, if it pleased him to follow her. Besides, for some time past the relations between them had grown cold, and

¹ "You must make it a success, cousin, by any means you like, only it must be a success" (Cavour to Madame de Castiglione, in the unpublished correspondence. Letter of Madame de Castiglione, ccxl.).

the Countess treated her husband with a disheartening haughtiness. He was with her during a winter in Paris and one London season; then, the end. Slanders that were not all calumny came back to him, while suspicious and miserable quarrels broke the bonds of the ill-matched union.

There were some rather strong reasons which might have kept the Countess in Turin. Fond memories carried her thoughts back to Florence. For the sake of a hazardous enterprise, the results of which were still so uncertain, she was to absent herself for a long time from the noble and courteous city, where, under the soft blue sky, her eyes had first opened on this earth.

But these hesitations were as evanescent as a sentimental dream. She felt a strange curiosity to see and be seen, and her arrival in Paris was looked forward to as an event of importance. She was promised and assured that triumphs awaited her on that stage of the Tuileries, which was incomparable among the European Courts. So, with a superb boldness and confidence she advanced straight to her goal.

CHAPTER II

DAYS OF TRIUMPH

Arrival in Paris—The Princess Mathilde—A story told concerning the Princess, the Russian Count, Anatole Demidoff, and the sculptor, Dupré—Visit to her compatriot and relative, Marianna Walewska, at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs—Presentation of Mme. de Castiglione at the Tuileries; extraordinary sensation caused by her marvellous beauty—The Emperor immediately attracted—Between ambition and love—Unofficial discussions of the Italian question—Pending the realisation of her plans, visit of the Countess to England—Lord and Lady Holland's cordial welcome—Visit to Twickenham—Some private letters of the Duke d'Aumale—A meeting which marked an epoch in Mme. de Castiglione's life.

SHE arrived at the most brilliant moment of the Second Empire. It was indeed the noontide hour of that period of unparalleled luxury and gaiety which in later days was to receive such severe criticism, the while false shame, animated by jealousy or even by regret, strove to cover up its acts in a veil of forgetfulness.

Verily that year in Paris, mirth and pleasure abounded on every hand. The city was enveloped in an enchanted atmosphere of enjoyment. Balls, suppers, music, gallantry, formed one continuous round which only the need to take breath could momentarily arrest.

Of that France and Paris, social and political, which she was now voluntarily entering, and which was to play such an important part in her life's story, the Countess de Castiglione had learnt little, save that it was a pleasant land, whose mission was to supply vaudevilles, novels, fashions, articles of the toilet-table, and ideas, for the rest of Europe.

In order to begin her education, one of her first acts after reaching Paris was to betake herself to the house in the Rue de Courcelles, where the Princess Mathilde held her court of witty and clever men.¹ At one moment of her life Mathilde-Napoleon had been a sort of compatriot of the Countess. Daughter of Jerome and of Catherine of Wurtemberg, she had passed much of her early youth in Florence. It was at the epoch when all the Bonapartes, repudiated by France, had gathered around "Madame-Mère." It had been preceded by successive flittings from Rome and Trieste, and by the varying vicissitudes which had forced her royal parents to leave, first their marvellous villa of Montford, and afterwards their more modest dwelling in the Eternal City. How often during the happy years of her girlhood she had delighted the eyes of the Florentines, as she rode through the avenues and parks of their city with the grace of an accomplished horsewoman, a grace which her natural wish to please considerably heightened. In spite of the storms which rather frequently disturbed the peace of her home, it was in Florence that she had known some of the brightest years of her life. At one time, indeed, it had seemed probable that she would make her home permanently there after her marriage with Count Demidoff. (She had previously refused her cousin, Louis Napoleon, who, a guest at Arenenberg, was unremarked by the world. His star had not yet risen.)

Nicchia was but a tiny, curly-haired child when Matilda Napoleone became engaged to the Russian

¹ According to an extract from one of the Princess's hitherto unpublished letters, she settled there during the winter of 1852. "I was in town yesterday. I am more than ever delighted with the house at No. 24. It is ideal. I do not yet know when I can go in, but the painting is finished" (Saturday, August 7, 1852).

Count, Anatole Demidoff, a Tuscan prince of San-Donato. The niece of the Great Emperor might easily have looked higher. Had not that powerful autocrat of the North, the Czar Nicolas, cherished the dream of bestowing the hand of a Napoleon on his son Alexander ?

But the Princess listened to the voice of love, heeding neither the Czar's wishes nor the arguments which her father, Jerome, the ex-King of Westphalia, opposed to her projected marriage. She was doomed later to a swift and terrible disillusionment, but at the moment she could not believe there existed under heaven a more desirable *parti* than Count Demidoff, so handsome, so rich, and wearing his Circassian uniform with so proud an air. Some futile attempts were made to dissuade her from the match. Vague hints reached her of the Count's inordinate fondness for the other sex. But to all such rumours she turned a deaf ear, and she knew nothing whatever of Demidoff's unbridled appetite for gambling and general debauchery, nor of his tyrannical instincts—a something of savagery implanted in the blood he had inherited from his ancestors.

No one had told her of the summary fashion in which, a short time before, he had broken the ties which bound him to a certain Mme. de Montaut. People had not thought fit to let the innocent *fiancée* hear how, in order to ensure complete release from his forsaken mistress, he had well-nigh killed her with blows from whip, cane, and fist, while he dragged her by her hair down the stairs leading from the first floor of her house into the courtyard.¹ She knew nothing of this charming

¹ "With a blow from his riding-whip he cut open cheek and eyelid." (See the letters of Fortunée Hamelin to M. de C—, Paris, February 2, 1840.) But the ex-muscadine, Fortunée Hamelin, did not know the whole truth concerning this brutality. In the savage treatment inflicted by Demi-

conduct on the part of her lover, and continued to live in dreamland. Before her charmed eyes everything took on a roseate hue. Leaning on the arm of her Russian prince, she felt herself ready to step fearlessly forward on life's journey. Like a cry of victory, she flung the news to her friends.

"My letter to-day must be short, but it will serve to let you know that my dearest wishes are realised, and that I am happy beyond all powers of expression. My marriage with Anatole Demidoff is fixed for the 15th October next. This most important act of my life is to take place here, at Quarto. I cannot tell you how happy I am, and how absolutely sure of the future."¹ The honeymoon was ideal. Wherever the happy couple went, they aroused admiration and envy.² Anatole's manner towards his wife was tender in the extreme, and reverently deferential. Both he and she spoke of their supreme happiness to all whom they met. It was much too beautiful to last.

The Count Demidoff had now fulfilled his cherished dream of possessing as wife this princess, one of the most beautiful women in all Europe. Nevertheless, he quickly resumed his dissolute habits, though at the same time exacting from the Princess a rigorous conformity with convention and a blind submission to his will, partaking of the character of Russian serfdom. She on her side, naturally high-spirited, outspoken, frank, and independent, always ready to answer with a smile doff on Mme. de Montaut there had been another motive, another pretext rather, besides his wish to break with her—a revenge à la *Cosaque* for unfaithfulness, either real or imaginary.

¹ *Correspondence of the Princess Mathilde*. Hitherto unpublished letter addressed to the Countess R—, September 10, 1840.

² "Mme. Regnault tells me wonders concerning the divine beauty, grace, and wit of Mme. Demidoff. . . ." (Letter from Fortunée Hamelin. La Madeleine, September 8, 1841).

and gentle words the compliments paid to her youth, attractiveness, and wit, could not bend to the yoke without a struggle. If Anatole Demidoff daily arrogated to himself as a man all imaginable rights in the dissipation of his wealth and physical powers, he was none the less liable to furious and unreasoning outbreaks of jealousy where his wife was concerned. Painful and disgraceful domestic scenes resulted. Demidoff's hand was as violent as his character. At length things were brought to a climax by an outrage on his part which rendered all attempts at reconciliation hopeless. One night at a ball he publicly slapped the Princess's face while her pretty cheeks were still flushing from the mingled delights of dancing and flirting, in which she had been innocently indulging. A legal separation followed as a matter of course, provoking much scandalous gossip. The Princess Mathilde, no longer Mme. Demidoff, only resumed that name periodically to sign receipts for the income of £200,000 which, by the Czar's orders, her husband was forced to allow her. Known to the world henceforth as her Imperial Highness, she did not choose, even when with her most intimate friends, to be reminded of this stormy period of her past life. The name of the princely libertine, now wholly given over to dissipation, was never uttered in her hearing. Occasionally, however, if talking of Florence with those very dear to her, or with Italians such as the Countess de Castiglione, Mathilde would recall her married life. But it was not to bless its memory. She used to grow particularly angry at the remembrance of a certain incident which she one day related to Mme. de Castiglione. It had taken place in Florence, almost at the beginning of her honeymoon, and when already its golden rays had begun somewhat to pale.

The Princess had requested a notable Tuscan sculptor, Giovanni Dupré, to execute a small portrait-statue of herself in marble. The artist, though expressing himself as being greatly flattered by the order, yet hesitated to carry it out without first having obtained the consent of the Prince of San-Donato, for he well knew the quarrelsome temper of the latter. But the Princess insisted in so charming a manner that he allowed his scruples to be overcome. The sittings were arranged, and Mathilde betook herself to the studio with unflinching regularity. Model and artist understood each other perfectly. The work progressed rapidly and well. Then, just as it was on the point of completion, an unpleasant incident occurred. One afternoon when Dupré happened to be alone in the studio, Anatole Demidoff arrived upon the scene, strode up the hall and, without wasting time in idle compliments, stopped short before the bench where lay his wife's statuette, enveloped in wet cloths.

"Ah, what interesting work have you here, Signor Dupré?"

"Oh, your Excellency, that is nothing—nothing at all!"

"Let me see it all the same, I beg of you! Remove these wrappings!"

"*Ma no! C'e nulla!* There is really nothing there except a little unworked plaster which I cannot show you, as it is not yet ready for exhibition!"

"Come, my dear fellow, you know I am very inquisitive!"

So saying, he lifted the wet covering from the model, looked quietly at it, and remarked sneeringly, "Pretty thing, that! Charming, really! But tell me who gave you the order for it?"

Dupré, after some stammering and hesitation, managed to explain that the Princess had planned a pleasant surprise for her husband by showing herself to him fashioned in marble.

"Hm!" replied the husband—who, it must be confessed, was on the whole justified in regarding the model's artistic lack of clothes with displeasure—"the Princess did wrong to order her portrait from you without first getting my consent, and you, on your side, did wrong in satisfying her whim. The next time she comes to the studio, you will be good enough to beg her from me to seek out for herself less important occupations. As for you, I particularly enjoin upon you to destroy this work, and never let it be heard of again!"

Under the harshness of this injunction the sculptor remained dumbfounded. He felt, too, the most poignant regret at being forced to destroy the beautiful figure which he had modelled with all an artist's pride, and for which he had conceived a sort of affection.

"My dear Dupré," continued the Prince, who from the expression of his face easily divined his inward struggle, "I quite understand your hesitation and dismay. But I repeat that I do not like this piece of work. Undoubtedly, later on, I shall be glad to have a portrait of my wife carved by such a chisel as yours; it would form a suitable companion to a very beautiful statue of Mme. Letizia by Canova, which I have in my galleries. Nevertheless, I repeat to you, emphatically, that this particular figure must be broken up and never again heard of. In return, I promise to give you other and far more important commissions."

The artist, realising that his own interests were at stake, did not absolutely refuse to carry out the order,

but asked for a delay of one day. The Prince granted it, graciously pressed his hand, embraced him with a show of friendly feeling, and quitted the studio. The next day, at her accustomed hour, the beautiful Mathilde, elegantly dressed and looking very happy, arrived upon the scene. She walked towards a mirror, arranged one or two of her curls, and then posing herself as usual, remarked—

“*Eccomi!* Here I am!”

Dupré related the incident of the previous day, expressed his deep vexation, but said that he had decided to obey the Prince’s behest.

“But,” cried the Princess, overwhelmed with dismay, “we cannot yield to this insulting caprice. It is absurd and humiliating to the last degree. I demand, I insist that you continue your task!”

Finally, finding expostulation useless, she was persuaded to regain her calm, give up the sitting, and return home. But thereafter she continued to feel as much resentment against the artist, who was helpless in the matter, as she did against her husband, the real author of her disappointment. Long afterwards, in Paris, Dupré had proof of this one evening when, at a reception at the Tuileries, he encountered her Imperial Highness. Mathilde passed him by without vouchsafing any sign of recognition—a slight which she afterwards explained by saying, “Yes! We knew each other a long time ago, but considering the fashion in which he treated me, I am not at all disposed to renew our acquaintance!” And entrenching herself thus behind her woman’s logic, she did not deign to honour him with a glance throughout the whole evening.

Mme. de Castiglione knew this story with which

indeed, the sculptor Dupré was wont to entertain his contemporaries.

Not only the Princess Mathilde, but also the pretty Countess Walewska (formerly with her husband at the French Embassy in London, she was now hostess of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs), considered it a pleasure to receive Cavour's envoy. They had known each other intimately in Florence, and believed they were cousins more or less removed.¹ Countess Walewska's mother, whose Christian name was Isabelle, had been a Princess Poniatowska. When very young she married a Count Bentivoglio,² by whom she had one son. Her second marriage was with the Marquis Zanobi-Ricci. Of this union was born a daughter, that Marie-Anne who for so long a time charmed Florentine society with the gentleness and grace which were an inheritance from her mother.³

Count Walewski, appointed by Louis-Philippe Minister-Plenipotentiary to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, made the acquaintance of the Ricci family. (He was Alexandre-Colonna Walewski, born in Poland, and son of Napoleon I., and of a woman whose beauty and patriotism, but still more the passionate devotion which

¹ "So far as I know, the Countess de Castiglione was not in any way related to the Countess Walewska. The latter's only sister (and she had no brothers by her own father), called Blanche, was married to the Marquis Tolomei of Florence" (Private letter from the Marquis de Ricci-Riccardi. Carmignano, Tuscany, 20th September 1911).

² In 1821. On the 9th June in the same year Count Prosper Bentivoglio died.

³ "The Marquise Ricci who, by her third marriage, became Marquise de Piccolellis, long held a celebrated salon in Florence. Her own witty talk and the exquisite courtesy for which she was noted made it the resort of the *élite*, not only of the city itself, but of the whole of Italy and of foreign countries. She died nearly twenty-five years ago, and those of us who were her friends still cherish her memory" (Ibid. Private letter written to M. Henri Prior, and communicated to the author, 20th September 1911).

she inspired in the Great Emperor, have made her famous.) Strongly attracted towards the daughter of the house, he found in her, as he was himself accustomed to say, his "fate." She became his wife, and the second Countess Walewska. She went with him to France, to Louis-Philippe's Court, where every one had a smile for the young bride. Thence in 1852, at the happiest moment of the Anglo-French Alliance, she accompanied her husband to the embassy in London, but remained there only long enough to leave its social world full of regret at her departure. Returning to Paris, the Count and Countess settled down in much luxury at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, at that time the most magnificent ministerial residence in all Europe. It was there that Cavour's emissary presented herself just in time to receive an invitation to the fancy dress ball of the 17th February 1856, that famous fête which afterwards caused so much gossip concerning the masked Emperor and the Countess de Castiglione universally acclaimed Queen of Hearts. . . . Hearts! In very truth her path was strewn with them! Other official receptions followed in the train of this first one. At the Ministry for Foreign Affairs no one had been so much looked at as she, no one so much admired. And it was the same at the Tuileries, where meanwhile she had been received officially.

Next to the Empress herself, the three women who occupied the centre of the Court stage were the Princess Mathilde, Mme. Walewska, and the Countess de Castiglione.

Opinion might be divided as to which of the three was the superior in the single detail of wit, grace, or charm, but compared as a whole, all were agreed that the first two stars paled in splendour before the refulgent

shining of the third. With good reason might she have declared—

“ . . . Je n'ai point de rivale
A qui je fasse tort en la traitant d'égale.”

That title she conceded to no one, but remained the “*Unique*.”

It was on the evening of a certain Wednesday, one of the official days, that the Countess de Castiglione for the first time mounted the double flight of stone steps, somewhat steep and high, which led to the reception rooms of the Tuileries. Passing through the vestibule where stood the red-coated chamberlain, whose duty it was to receive the guests, she entered the crowded *galerie des fêtes*, and thus gathered her first impression of *le château* on a gala-night.

What a brilliant spectacle it was! Warm light flooded the whole hall, and was reflected from innumerable mirrors, shedding its myriad gleams on the gold of the uniforms and the silk of the toilets. What a vision, that presented to her view of a bejewelled and elegantly attired company, thronging this long gallery from end to end, and reaching to the imposing Hall of the Marshals where were the Imperial couple, and to which, so etiquette ordained, only the most important dignitaries were admitted.

The Countess passed under the high crimson velvet drapery that marked the dividing line between the two halls. Was she not Cavour's cousin, and had she not, by virtue of this fact, if not on account of her secret mission, the rank of ambassadress? With undisguised admiration, people watched her advance. She too, on her part, looked about her with astonishment. In spite of her Italian prejudices and exalted belief in the glory of her own beautiful country, how poor and mean, in com-

parison with this imperial splendour, must have seemed the *festicciole* of the impoverished Court of Piedmont! If the morality of the French Court, if the character of the courtiers, were not above reproach, at least everything at the Tuileries, where etiquette and outward show were concerned, was on a magnificent scale. All the men present—generals, ambassadors, ministers, members of the Conseil d'État, young attachés and aides-de-camp, prefects, senators, down even to the magistrates in their black velvet robes—wore gala dress. And to the women of the company these varied and many coloured materials, decorations, galloons, and richly embroidered laces served as an effective background, heightening their beauty. How dashing they were, these dignitaries, in all the bravery of their gold or silver braid, their white knee-breeches, and their plumed hats held lightly under the arm! And how different in their carriage and general appearance from our republican officials of to-day, constrained to don simple citizen dress, with their modest decoration of ribbon and cross, the only outward ornamentation allowed them! Tableaux of fêtes, constantly changing with kaleidoscopic rapidity and glittering array, the remembered vision of thy glory leaves in the mind a kind of historic regret for those wondrous spectacles which the world will never see again!

On the evening of the 24th of November 1855, it seemed as if, silhouetted against the superb background just described, only one figure, after those of the Emperor and Empress, commanded attention—Mme. de Castiglione. What a sensation her entrance caused! Elsewhere¹ we have recalled the historic picture, and now ask permission to repaint it here in the same terms.

¹ *The Women of the Second Empire.*

She arrived a little late. A thrill of curiosity heralded her approach. The sensation caused by her entry was such that the music ceased to play, the dances stopped short. A magnetic current of admiration passed through the hall. The Empress involuntarily took a step towards her. Afterwards, when she had made her curtsy to the sovereigns and had seated herself, the Emperor—first assigning the Duke Ernest of Saxe-Coburg as the Empress's partner—approached her to offer his hand for the next cotillon. Napoleon III., though not claiming to pass as a model in the art of Vestris—which, indeed, both his age and proportions made impossible—yet danced better than most royal princes, distinctly better than his uncle, the Great Emperor. In this quadrille, with the beautiful Mme. de Castiglione as his partner, he was much admired. A little later on in the same evening they waltzed together, afterwards strolling about and chatting till the music of the dance ceased.

All eyes were fastened on her, on that vivid figure with its soft curves and alluring grace. Her pure profile, her eyes almond-shaped and glowing, her delicately modelled mouth, her superbly abundant and shining chestnut hair, her slender neck poised with distinction on shoulders modelled to perfection, her bared throat¹ whose audacious beauty seemed, according to the expression of an eye-witness, to fling a challenge at all the women present, her regal bust, her arms and hands of an exquisite contour, her incomparably moulded outlines—everything about her was made to be loved. Her success was complete, un-

¹ One of those privileged to see close at hand the interesting vision, said of this throat and bosom so daringly offered to view, that it "rose up proudly like that of a young Moorish woman."

paralleled, and was pronounced to be the event of the week.¹

The extraordinary sensation which Mme. de Castiglione had caused on the occasion of her first presentation at the Tuileries was afterwards repeated at the "Mondays" of the Empress, at the ministerial balls, and at Compiègne. Her triumphs were so marked that the Emperor evinced an interest in them, and the Empress became alarmed. Napoleon III. very soon succumbed to the charm of this incomparable Florentine who was the object of such admiring curiosity, that when she passed through the crowd of guests at a State function the people present, regardless of good manners, were wont to jump on their chairs to look at her. Louis-Napoleon, though his native goodness of heart made it easy for him generously to forgive personal injuries, was of a somewhat morose and suspicious temper, and was a past-master in the art of concealing his feelings before the inquiring gaze of his entourage. He knew how to veil his true sentiments as he veiled his eyes, which were the colour of water in a still lake, and how to make his face a blank, baffling thus the keenest eyed who sought in vain to discover the trend of his thought. But face to face with a pretty woman, he was much less capable of self-control. Then his instinctive sentimentality was aroused, his erstwhile expressionless eyes knew a prompt light of which both the cause and the meaning were plain to his faithful Bacciochi. People quickly grew to remark the symptoms of his sudden interest in Mme. de Castiglione. One evening at Compiègne a performance by the actors of the Comédie Française was being given at the Court Theatre. The Countess, pleading a slight

¹ *Loc. cit.*

indisposition, had begged to be excused. It was noticed during the evening that the Emperor in his *loge* seemed much preoccupied, and that he twisted his moustache more than usual—a well-known sign of nervousness with him. In the interval between the first two acts, in the sight of the whole house, he quitted the side of the Empress and disappeared. The next day it was known everywhere that he had gone to inquire in person after the lovely foreigner.

And thus gossip began. A story was whispered abroad of a fan which Mme. de Castiglione had adroitly let drop, and which Napoleon himself had stooped to lift from the ground and restore to its owner. Scarcely had France and the surrounding countries recovered from their surprise at the outcome of his romance with a Spanish beauty, yet now he was launched on another with an Italian. How would it end? Would it prove to be a secret and passing caprice, or was it the beginning of an avowed and open favouritism likely to endure? This was what more than one wily and corrupt Minister of State asked himself with a malicious joy as he tried to lift the veil shrouding the future of this fortune in the ascendant.

The Countess at length felt that the moment had come for discussing political affairs. She recalled that her object in coming to France was not merely to finish her wedding trip in an agreeable manner, but that she was there in the capacity of an ambassadress officially accredited in the service of Sardinian diplomacy; that she was the appointed spokeswoman of the Italy-to-be; that for this reason, and no other, Cavour had allied her to the multifarious agencies he had set in motion all tending to the one high aim; that, as an intelligent and beautiful woman, by nature an adept in the devices of

coquetry, she must act on the advice given her by the great Piedmontese, "to flirt with the Emperor, if need be to seduce him,"¹ and to lead him to reveal to her in private the essential points which he, as Chief of State, might have to consider in view of bringing about an active *entente* with the Court of Turin. A letter, brief but significant, which she had recently received from Cavour (the original lies before me as I write) repeated in explicit terms, "Succeed, my cousin, by any means you please. Only succeed!"²

Success alone mattered. No opportunity was to be neglected, still less lost. Such was the energetic principle of policy to which Italian subtlety had given birth. "Everything depends on the man!" the Florentine Bettino Ricasoli³ had written the year before. And here in truth was the man, mysterious and taciturn, universally considered the most powerful monarch in all Europe, who must be forced to speak out plainly.

It is well known that Italians have an innate ability, as well as a passion, for the conduct of public affairs, though they do not always deal with them in a spirit of moderation and method. The Countess, then, was naturally predisposed to her mission, and asked nothing better than to employ in its success all the seduction of her woman's charm. She resolved to lose no time in pursuance of her plans, and to effect her object at all costs—yes, even if, for the complete conquest of the Emperor, she must offer a reward which may easily be divined. Truth to tell, she held her own physical perfections in

¹ "A beautiful Countess has been enlisted in the cause of Italian diplomacy. I have suggested to her to flirt with the Emperor, and have promised to reward success by asking for the position of Secretary at St. Petersburg for her brother. She began her task discreetly at a concert in the Tuileries" (Letter from Cavour to Luigi Cibrario, known as Luigi Chiola).

² *Private Correspondence of Mme. de Castiglione*, ccxi. and ccxl.

³ *Letters and Manuscripts of the Baron Bettino Ricasoli*, t. iii. p. 303.

such high esteem, that she was not prepared to be lightly prodigal of them. She kept them as a resource in reserve, a last resort, should other means fail of accomplishing her great designs. For with a spice of conceit not unnatural to her she gave these projects of hers vast proportions. She identified them with her personal existence, as if on her alone rested all the responsibility for their success or non-success. Her vanity was flattered and her imagination excited by the importance of her mission, and Cavour willingly allowed her to draw all possible glory from it. He used her woman's power as he used twenty other means at his disposal for the furtherance of his objects—political wire-pulling, secret or official, the Press, Italian emigration, correspondence with foreign countries, and Court influence abroad. These all were employed by him with the twofold object of, in the first instance, establishing the position of Piedmont on a firm basis, and secondly of increasing her prestige and strength. He despised nothing capable of aiding him to attain the desired end.

Wishing to preserve her independence, to receive her guests, to write, act, and perhaps love, in secret, without however being too far away from the society which was the scene of her constantly recurring triumphs, the Countess had chosen a dwelling situated amongst the old-world gardens of Passy. It was a little house in the style of the *régence*, a veritable bower, vine-clad without, and within hung in silk tapestries and filled with dainty trifles. Though retired, it was not at the ends of the earth. A journey from the Tuileries to the Rue de la Pompe took less than an hour. Napoleon, unaccustomed as he was to grant special favours to charming women without hope of return, would surely have considered himself much to

blame had he never extended his evening drive (guarded by his private detectives and with his confidential coachman¹) so far as this habitation, hermitage in appearance, indeed, but ruled by no hermit-like regulations.

Inadequately informed of what was going on between the Emperor and Mme. de Castiglione, Parisian society easily pictured the kind of interview for which "important conversations on the subject of Italy and Austria" were the ostensible pretext. He and she were alone, *tête-à-tête*, listening to, and seeing, one another. She was only eighteen. He was ardent and impressionable. It was no longer a question of an emperor condescending from his high estate to show courtly and momentary deference to a guest. All differences of rank were effaced. In that quiet room there were only two human beings of different sex, meeting on equal ground, and drawn to each other by an irresistible attraction.

It was generally believed in Paris that the Countess was the Emperor's established "favourite." Some good people, absolutely sure of facts about which they knew nothing, stated, indeed, that this was Mme. de Castiglione's second experience in the way of royal lovers, asserting that Victor-Emmanuel had at one time honoured her—if we may use the expression—with the kind of affection of which he was known to be so lavish. Thus the story ran in Paris. But in Florence, those most audacious in their guesses said that she was Napoleon III.'s daughter, and that his present intimacy with her was only the outcome of the natural affection he had felt for her from birth.

The Countess, on her side, in letters and in talks

¹ I was once offered the "Memoirs" of the Emperor's confidential coachman!

of later date, ridiculed the second and third of these hypotheses, and categorically denied the first. She found more difficulty in refuting the last named than was the case with the other two. The evidence of several notable witnesses seemed to make it probable. General Fleury, whose posthumous evidence¹ she invalidated on the ground that he had sighed after her in vain, had closely watched this game of diplomatic coquetries. As the Emperor's aide-de-camp, whose duty it was to accompany him everywhere, he certified in his *Memoirs* that the success of the Countess was complete, and that, for a time at least, Napoleon III. was absolutely enslaved by the beautiful Italian. Other witnesses refer to certain signs (*oculis subjecta fidelibus*) which helped to prove clearly the intimacy of the relationship existing between them.

However that may have been, it is certain that, favoured by the circumstances which brought them together, Mme. de Castiglione spoke often with the Emperor of Victor-Emmanuel, Cavour, and the hoped-for Union of Italy.

Moreover, knowing as she did what important promises he had made in his days of exile to high-placed Peninsula politicians, clever in flattering his vanity as a man and a ruler, in strengthening his conviction that his rôle in Europe was that of arbitrator, Mme. de Castiglione, in the most charming manner possible, personified for the Emperor both Italy and the Italian nationality. The first unquestionable result of her secret influence was that, after a little hesitation, Napoleon decided to demand Cavour's presence at the Congress of Paris.

The ground had been admirably prepared long

¹ See his posthumous *Memoirs*.

beforehand for the Countess's work. She had no need, indeed, to suggest this project of a re-born Italy to the Emperor, seeing that it was one which he himself had cherished before she was born. The wife of the artist, Cornut, had been brought up with Napoleon almost as his sister in the Château of Arenenberg, and in later days, recalling her memories of him in his boyhood, she was wont to say that he had always had one double and vast ambition—to become Emperor of the French and liberator of Italy. These two ideas had developed in his mind side by side, as if the second were the necessary consequence of the first.

A short time after the *coup d'état* of the 2nd December 1851, the Prince-President sent his faithful Persigny to the Baron de Radowitz, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the King of Prussia, Frederick William IV.,¹ to pave the way for his early acceptance of the re-establishment of an Empire in France. Subsequent exchange of services between the two States was discussed. Then Persigny, having fulfilled the most important part of his mission, said (Radowitz long afterwards published the statement in his *Memoirs*):—"Our first work is to re-establish the French Empire. When that is done, we shall free Italy. While we are driving out Austria from Lombardy, why should you not seize the opportunity to drive her out of Germany?" In a double ray of prophetic insight were thus foreshadowed the events which were accomplished on the battlefields of Solferino and Sadowa.

Four years later the world was surprised to see a corps of the Sardinian army join the French, English, and Turkish contingents against the Czar Nicholas I., and people asked what special private interest moved the "Savoy foxes" to interfere in the conflict of the great

¹ Grand-uncle of the Emperor, William II.

Powers, since they, unlike the Bourbons of the Two Sicilies, had not the pretext to urge of occupying an outpost on the Mediterranean.¹ Subsequent events soon gave the wished-for explanation. The very next year the question of Italian Unity was brought before the Congress of Paris, receiving the encouragement of Napoleon's minister, who presided over the session.²

So far it was only the case of a fire-ship being launched upon the waves of international rivalries. A space of time must of necessity elapse between the declaration of the principle and that recourse to arms which would uphold it. Mme. de Castiglione decided to spend this period of waiting away from Paris. Leaving "her Napoleon," as in one of her letters she proudly called him, she went to London, and spent many pleasant days there.

She received a cordial welcome, and was hospitably entertained in several of the homes of the best English society, and more especially at Holland House. Lord and Lady Holland had known her as a child in her native Florence and felt a warm affection for her. In Lady Holland's society she experienced a mental and spiritual serenity above that to be found elsewhere, for she was as sure of her esteem as of her friendship. One evening in the drawing-room of this great English lady, some one ventured, the Countess being absent at the moment, to make gossiping allusion to her as "the Tuileries' favourite." Lady Holland immediately silenced the slanderer by saying haughtily, "If I were able to believe a word of such tales, Mme. de Castiglione would not be

¹ Clever in finding reasons for his acts, Cavour had persuaded his Parliament that it was to the interest of Piedmont, possessing as she did the important port of Genoa, to dispute with Russia the exclusive dominion of the Mediterranean. See *Acts of the Sub-Alpine Parliament*, vol. vi.

² Count Walewski.

here as my guest!" But even had it been really true, her regard for the Countess would have made her disbelieve it.

On her arrival at Holland House she was shown into a large and beautifully furnished bedroom. On her toilet-table—the first thing at which a woman just arrived from a journey naturally looks—she noticed a mirror of unusually artistic workmanship. It was a bevelled hand-glass, surmounted by her crest, and framed by two angels with widely outspread wings worked in gold. Lying beside the exquisite thing some lines, in Lord Holland's handwriting, revealed for whom it was intended.¹

During the whole of her stay in the mansion of Lord and Lady Holland she was encompassed by a thousand thoughtful attentions, and was, in short, most pleasantly spoiled. Holland House, though far enough removed from the surrounding streets and avenues to give an impression of lordly isolation, was so situated in the midst of its great park that it formed the chief ornament of one of the handsomest parts of London. At one time considered to be quite in the country, the city had little by little gained upon it through the erection of successive buildings; but it had kept intact its antique architecture, its old-world apartments, and all the interest of its ancestral traditions. In it were to be seen the room where the austere Sully slept when acting as envoy to Elizabeth from the Béarnais, and that of Cromwell who lived in Holland House during his struggle

¹ 1st July 1857.

"To the Countess Castiglione.

A lovely gift I fain would send to thee,
What I deem loveliest in this mirror see!

HOLLAND."

against the King and Parliament. Pictures, hangings, and furniture out of bygone centuries remained as they had ever been; no attempts at modernising had been allowed in this historically interesting mansion.

During the London season Lady Holland gave fêtes whose brilliancy and originality gained for them a European reputation. The English Royal Family, as well as visiting sovereigns and princes, came to these garden parties made doubly attractive by being held in the midst of the verdure of Holland Park. One known as the "Scottish Fête" was especially famous, and dated back to the Middle Ages. Amongst those who admired this particular entertainment most was the Duke d'Aumale. Henri of Orleans was indeed a very close friend of Lord Holland, who bequeathed to him in his will that magnificent portrait of Talleyrand which is to-day one of the most valued treasures of the Chantilly Gallery.

One afternoon the Duke called at Holland House, bringing with him a member of his own house party at Twickenham, Louis Estancelin, to whom, after some gracious words of welcome, Lady Holland said—

"Do you know the wonder of the season, the Countess de Castiglione?"

"Not yet," he replied; "I have only just arrived from France, and so up to the present that charming vision has not delighted my eyes!"

"What a pity! But you will soon meet her, and then you must tell me what you think of her."

He little dreamed in listening to these words that he was to become the friend of Mme. de Castiglione, the most capricious of her sex, for a period of forty-five years; that their friendship would be without restraint,

strong in joy as in sorrow and, because no hint of love was in it, that it would be unchanged and unchanging—a friendship whole-hearted and free, of a character entirely unique.

He had not long to await the promised pleasure of meeting her. When he beheld her, he thought her what she was, in very truth—a creature of extreme loveliness. Poet and dreamer though he was, he did not immediately place her on a pedestal and fall down before her in worship; instead, he tried to get nearer to her, to learn to know her better. Only a few days afterwards he saw her again, but merely as a passing vision. And then, under quite unexpected circumstances, they met for the third time at the residence of the Duke d'Aumale, Orleans House.

One day Louis Estancelin was reading in the room there which the Prince had placed at his disposal. He was utterly absorbed in his task, for thanks to the courteous kindness of the Prince, he had been given access to the autograph correspondence of Richelieu with Louis XIII. concerning the trial of Cinq-Mars and his friend, Jacques de Thou. Lying open before him were Richelieu's two letters, one addressed to the King, the other to his intendant. The former was the original of the coldly cruel statement in which the terrible Cardinal set forth the imperative reasons of State which, according to him, had made the death of "M. Le Grand" necessary. Very deliberately he studied the large and trembling handwriting, the parchment yellow with age, the threads of red silk which had served to tie the formidable seal of the cardinal-minister. Undoubtedly, too, he meditated upon the inflexibility of that priestly soul who placed God ever behind his sinister designs of ambition and vengeance. He thought as he read this

historic page, written by a pitiless hand,¹ that the true facts thus revealed were hardly in accord with Alfred de Vigny's legendary account of them:—

“At this moment,” said the King, “M. Le Grand is passing a *mauvais quart d'heure*.” Now, Louis XIII. could not possibly have known at that time of the execution of Cinq-Mars, for the Marquis of Effiat's son was not yet condemned to death.

While Louis Estancelin, the excitement of the reading written on his face, was consulting these records of the war waged by an unbounded and merciless ambition, some one knocked at the door. Little pleased to be thus disturbed, he uttered a perfunctory “Come in!” and one of the Prince's footmen entered. He was tall and thin, with an expression of childlike innocence, and a nature so simple that the Duke d'Aumale once said about him, “How little that kind of person dreams of the importance of the rôle he plays in our lives!” He bore the gentle name of “Pitié,” a name which seemed expressly made for him. “What is it, Pitié?” Pitié replied with dignified slowness, “Madame the

¹ As a piece of historic information, here is the letter exactly as it was written by Richelieu:—

“12th September 1642.

“Your Majesty will receive at one and the same time two pieces of very different news. One is the surrender and taking of Perpignan, for France the finest and most important fortress in the world; the other is the condemnation and execution of Monsieur Le Grand and of M. de Thou, who in the opinion of all concerned in their trial were most manifestly proved guilty.

“Both these events show *how dear to God Your Majesty is*, and I pray Him to continue to pour out His blessings upon Your Majesty, and to grant me health and strength to continue long in Your Majesty's service.

RICHELIEU.”

In this connection, it is perhaps pertinent to note the end of the epistle sent at the same time to his intendants:—

“I have no time for writing to you at length. Perpignan is in the hands of the King; M. Le Grand and M. de Thou are in the next world. These two facts show the mercy of God to the State and to the Faith—which may be said to be one and the same thing.—CARDINAL DE RICHELIEU.”

Countess de Coiffier¹ has sent me to say that Mme. the Countess de Castiglione is in the red drawing-room." She was downstairs and had sent to ask for him! The surprise was so great that he promptly forgot all about Louis XIII., Richelieu, Cinq-Mars, and the Lyons tragedy. He threw down his pen, shut up the precious collection of documents, and hurried down.

In the red drawing-room the Duke, the Duchess, and Mme. de Castiglione were seated together deep in conversation. They were talking of Italy and France, of Cavour,² and of Louis-Napoleon. Only three or four years previously Henri d'Orléans had written to one of his political friends, "You are now provided with an Emperor. When you are tired of him, send me word!"³

The Countess was in a position to give him at first hand the latest news. The entrance of Estancelin interrupted their talk. The far-famed lady from Florence happened to be placed beneath a portrait of Cardinal Richelieu.⁴ Seated, as it were, at his feet, she looked a delightful child, the loveliest ever seen, with her long and curling fair hair, clear complexion, and vivacious air of pretty defiance. She wore a hat made of rice straw and turned up by a big bow of yellow taffetas. That

¹ Curious name coincidence! The Marquis Henri de Cinq-Mars, Louis XIII.'s favourite, was also known as "Coiffier de Ruzé d'Effiat." We should, however, mention that "Madame de Coiffier" was a name which Mme. de Castiglione often gave to herself in jest, for what reason is not known.

² Cavour and the Duke d'Aumale were well known to one another. In one of the Prince's hitherto unpublished letters we find a record of the following conversation which took place shortly before the Italian war:—

"The Emperor does not love you," said Cavour.

"I know it!"

"Yes, but what you perhaps do not know is how much he fears you!"

³ Hitherto unpublished letter, Twickenham, *s.d.*

⁴ Full-length portrait of the Duke, by Philippe de Champagne, at present in the Chantilly Gallery.

bow was destined to hold a great place in their memories and to act as a sort of talisman for their friendship.¹ Dressed in a gown of black silk gauze trimmed with yellow ribbons, she produced an indescribable effect. Her wavy hair, shining eyes, pearly teeth, and exquisite figure, everything about her was both fascinating and beautiful. But far from telling her this, he found himself standing before her silent and almost stern. Coursing through his brain was an odd mixture of the sensations which he had experienced through the fortuitous juxtaposition of these two beings about whom he was thinking. *He*, the man of a bygone day, that Cardinal of the hard face who covered his state crimes under the folds of his purple robe! And then *she*, this woman so sweet to look at, seated there under the portrait of the other! His conflicting emotions depicted on his face gave it an expression of severity. He admired her, but did not say so. In greeting her he had not had recourse to the customary speeches, the eternal compliments of which she was so tired! This was a new kind of man for her, and her interest was aroused. He, on his side, was strongly attracted by her. And from that moment began an intimate union which lasted, as we have already said, close on half a century.

The Countess paid many more visits to this mansion

¹ "After our *tête-à-tête* dinner this evening I want to introduce you to some one. But that need not prevent your having a quick, light, and early lunch at the Roses (a salon in the Café Voisin) with *yellow bow*, the same one, as fresh as I am myself, you know the Coiffier bow of 1857."—(Hitherto unpublished correspondence of Mme. de Castiglione. Letter ccxxxvi.)

"This famous *yellow bow* has always caused talk and misfortune. It still exists, if not exactly as it was, at least not altogether faded. It would still be capable of inspiring happiness, were it not for the age of its sentiments which have been spread over it in sorrowful and regretful tears" (Letter ccli.)

"See, I am giving you the *yellow bow*, so that it may remain in the legendary archives of Baromesnil together with the golden keys!" (Letter ccclxliii.)

at Twickenham, situated about ten miles from London in the county of Middlesex.¹ The Duchess received her with kindness. And she delighted the eyes and the mind of Prince Henri d'Orléans, who conceived for her an affection which, while not perhaps so constant as that of the "Norman," was yet even more intimate because of their frequent meetings in Italy at Zucco and Spezia.

The Duke was not at that time the nervous and melancholy man he became after the death of his much-loved wife. Nor did he feel very keenly the discomforts of exile, being only at the beginning of that period which he hoped would be short. Moreover, in this temporary resting-place, he was everywhere surrounded by the outward and visible signs of his country's glory. The sight of his study, with its walls hung with many tricolour and African standards, impressed his visitors with a sense of French greatness. Its military aspect was heightened by panoplies with the sword of the great Condé standing out in solitary state. Sometimes, book or pen laid aside, the Duke would super-
vise from his study window the airing of his own

¹ The date of the acquisition of this property is recorded in a short letter, simple and filled with rural details, written by the Duke d'Aumale to one of his former fellow-students at the College Henri IV. We give it here because of the pleasant familiarity of its homely chat.

"EMBERCOURT, 29th *September* 1852.

"MY DEAR LOUIS,—I have fulfilled my project of settling down here, and have bought the house at Twickenham which the King occupied in 1816. I am writing to remind you of your promise to procure me some good kinds of poultry. Let me know if you are able conveniently to send them to London, whence I can easily have them fetched.

"I have very little more to tell you. Besides, if I had any secret I wanted to confide in you, I should choose some other means than the post. However, official indiscretion will not prevent my saying that I wish I had other services to ask of you in addition to this one. Pending those happy hours, I am, near or far, your affectionate,—HENRI D'ORLÉANS."

general officer's uniform,¹ and at the sight, carrying him back to days of active warfare, his heart would glow with the re-born hope of once more later on donning them in his country's service. Then had he not, too, his valuable archives, library, pictures, and the choice furniture which he had had sent over from France, and which brought to him, heir of the Duc de Bourbon, the very atmosphere of his own Chantilly? He enjoyed hunting,² entertained largely, travelled a great deal, passed the winters most pleasantly on his Palermo estates,³ and wrote letters on all kinds of topics. Finally, in his hours of leisure, he made use of a wonderful collection of State documents in his possession to write, in an interesting and clear style, the history of one of the most illustrious families of France. He had

¹ Recounted by an eye-witness. See Ernest Daudet's *Le Duc d'Aumale*.

² "We have had some very good pheasant and partridge shooting, but for the best of all reasons, no fox-hunting. We have also added to our sports pike-fishing, which is the most dramatic and difficult of fresh-water fishing. (Duke d'Aumale. Hitherto unpublished letter, Richmond, 9th January 1856.) "We have had a month of gaiety and hunting." (Ibid. Twickenham, 26th December 1861.) "The coursing pack is in fettle. We have a good deal of hare and fox hunting. My little wood is becoming populated. We have shot three hundred and fifty pheasants in it this year. But I do not care to speak of that, when I think of our shooting parties with friends of former days. In any case, I am not at all set upon having big battues here; I have now enough brushwood for my coverts, and am satisfied with that." (Ibid. Hitherto unpublished letter, Woodnorton, Evesham, 6th February 1865.)

³ Henri d'Orléans adored Sicily, Palermo, and the wines of Zucco. "Do not forget," he wrote to one of his expected hosts, "that Palermo has the most delightful climate in the world." (Hitherto unpublished letter from the Duke d'Aumale, Twickenham, 9th September 1856.) Two years later, in writing to the same friend, he made this curious comparison between Nice and Palermo, wholly to the advantage of the Sicilian town. "I trust that the climate of Nice will do you infinite good. I am told it is charming; but for my own part would not wish to be in it even in a picture. I have an idea that it is a bastard sort of place, neither Italy nor France, with English villas and Russian society overrunning it. But Palermo, Sicily, Italy altogether, these are places for you!" (Hitherto unpublished letter, Twickenham, 20th November 1858.)

everything that great wealth can give; he knew how to enjoy in their rightful place reading, study, or recreation; by nature he was a philosopher, and so, in spite of his loss of certain prerogatives, the bitterness attendant on long exile, and the constant wounds which his patriotic sentiments received, his lot, after all, was not a wholly unhappy one.

It was at Orleans House that Mme. de Castiglione passed some of the happiest days of her first stay in England, an experience which she was able to repeat six years later. She came to know the *élite* of London society, and found their acquaintance a delight. Under Lady Holland's chaperonage she attended many magnificent official receptions and often went to the opera. And wherever she appeared her beauty drew all eyes and aroused that fever of admiring curiosity to which she had grown so accustomed that, regarding it as her natural right, she remained wholly unmoved by it.

CHAPTER III

A BROKEN DREAM

Between London and Paris—Her private reasons for staying at Dieppe—Details of a meeting in the room known as the “chamber of crime,” and its slight results—Return to the capital—How foreign questions suddenly came to assume importance in the talk of the day—The secret and active part of Madame de Castiglione in French and Italian negotiations that were to lead to the war with Austria—The Countess’s patriotism disappointed after the Peace of Villafranca—In consequence of her loudly expressed dissatisfaction, she is obliged to cross the frontier—In retirement near Florence—Account of an interesting visit to the Villa Gloria—A period of dullness and boredom—How Madame de Castiglione obtained permission to return to France—Between voyages—Dramatic circumstances attending one of her sojourns in Italy: “The bloody wedding”—Some months of mourning—Reappearance at the Tuileries.

THE Countess was not impatient to leave London, and even after crossing the Channel she made her way to Paris very slowly, by short stages. This was one of the first of those sudden disappearances which she so often employed later on to cause amazement. For an indefinite period she decided to live at Dieppe in a contemplative solitude rarely broken by visitors. In the inner circle of the Tuileries few people knew where she was in hiding. But the Emperor’s secretary, Mocquart, knew, when, writing to Mme. Walewska, he asked: “What has become of our beautiful recluse of Dieppe?”¹

In society and at court surprise was general that she should show so little ardour to renew her enchantments.

¹ A question doubtless inspired in high quarters. In 1912, Madame Walewska still showed me this letter.

Was this effulgent Parisian star of a single winter season about to vanish altogether from the horizon ?

It simply pleased the Countess de Castiglione (then under a jurisdiction of separation from her husband) to be where she chose; to make herself missed elsewhere; to renew an interrupted chat with the guest of Twickenham, the townsman of Dieppe, and the country gentleman at Baromesnil—in short, to enter upon a romance which never extended beyond the first chapter. The moment was propitious for both partners to this discreet conversation. At that time in his prime, there could have been no reason to complain of nature playing him false: which unfortunately was the case twenty or thirty years later, as one sees from the lady's constant and malicious reproaches.¹ But there at Dieppe he was neither deaf to the sweet allurements of a pretty mouth, nor slow to respond to the sentimental advances prepared for him. As for her, passionately fond as she was of dreaming, and cherishing lofty illusions—separated, moreover, from the husband whom she considered incapable of arousing strong emotions, and who, having in two years dissipated for her three-quarters of his fortune, no longer cared to continue the experiment—as for her, her soul had time to spare and leisure to spend.

For both of them it was a rare opportunity, outlined but never finished, which left a memory mingled with regrets. That room at Dieppe! In Madame de Castiglione's letters it is often mentioned, the room which Prince Napoleon called, we hope in irony, *the chamber of crime*. There were promises to be redeemed there eye

¹ "How and in what language you spoke of it! But that was before your deafness" (Letter xxiii.). "So much the worse for deaf ears!" (Letter liii.). "Come, open your eyes, listen, if you are still able to hear" (Letter ccviii., &c.).

to eye. Every sign announced an auspicious interview. Estancelin was tall and robust, with eyes full of energy, hair of a bright chestnut hue, an expressive face and a high colour; while she was divine in the blossoming time of youth, even though an air of sadness veiled her beautiful eyes. He no more pretended to be a dreamer in the affairs of the heart than in politics. With him the instinct of passion was elemental and vehement. When with beating heart he betook himself to this intimate rendezvous, he had no thought of conjuring up an image of a complex being, compounded of many things, such as the Countess, under all circumstances, desired to be considered. He said to himself that she would have laid aside her airs of a goddess threading the clouds: that he should find her adorned for intimacy, enticing, attractive. What, however, was his mistake! She appeared before him as though descended from Olympus, regally beautiful and resplendent with jewels: rings on all her fingers, bracelets up to her elbows. It seemed to him that the voluptuous detail of loving a woman need not necessarily imply so much brilliance and pomp. He beheld her in queenly state, and his admiration was such that it swallowed up all desire. They had not understood each other this time. Looking back afterwards on the episode, they were both vexed, as though at a badly managed affair.¹

The ardent impulse had not come to maturity.

¹ "And to think that you missed the coach twice, at Dieppe ten years ago, and at present! . . . *Au revoir*, in Paris, *without bracelets*" (Letter from Mme. de Castiglione to Estancelin, ccxxv.).

To judge by these constantly reiterated allusions, these famous bracelets had produced much embarrassment. . . . Several lustrums had elapsed since then. When the Countess de Castiglione wanted to induce her old friend to come to see her promptly in order to talk over questions that interested the princes, she hastened to let him know that she should be in plain attire, *without bracelets*, using the phrase in jest and in order to be certain that he would not break his word to her.

Estancelin had other reasons for remaining on the hither side of the boundary of a great passion; or, at least, he invented these reasons later to console himself, perhaps, for that which ought to have been, but was not. His was a temperament that was easily upset by a despotic and disturbing passion. He had but to choose, knowing well that, even failing *the one*, the charming world of women is never depopulated. About the spirit of a Castiglione there was too much agitation, and her high-strung nature raised everything to its highest pitch. And it was vain to demand of such a being that kind of tender affection, so deliciously complete, in which the heart and the senses find easy and gentle contentment. Their meeting, however, had had one memorable result. It created between them one of those firm and enduring friendships which time may try but cannot change, and which is the bond that unites vigorous souls.

Her diversions at Dieppe did not prevent the beautiful Castiglione from letting her mind ramble in other directions. She had not forgotten the imperative reasons that summoned her to the side of Napoleon III., with whom she had not yet accomplished her mission. The Italian question was growing urgent; its solution was not being pushed by the French Emperor. She perceived that she must don all her panoply, put herself in battle-array, and make a last effort with the weapons of her charm and beauty in order to carry out her purpose. In a word, it was her plain duty to return to Paris.

On her return she found everybody absorbed with foreign questions. The newspapers, the clubs, and the drawing-rooms were given up to the discussion of international rivalries that were daily growing more

acute. While all discussion of home affairs was ruthlessly taboo, discreet curiosity and comment were not forbidden in the realm of foreign affairs. The women, too, chattered about these things, and some of them took a violent fancy for the acquisition of solid diplomatic information. Among the most ardent was the Princess Lise Troubetzkoï; like the Princesses de Ligne and de Lieven, she had an air of being always in the thick of the whirl, and she never appeared without having in her pocket a letter from Gortschakoff or from some other great director of European diplomacy. At least so she claimed, according to the account given me long afterwards by the Countess Walewska. "Wait," she would say; "here, *à propos* of what you were saying, here is a letter I received from Gortschakoff this morning." And she would draw from her bosom a more or less crumpled missive, which she had been carrying about with her for perhaps a fortnight.

These great ladies viewed foreign questions according to their clannish prejudices or in the false light of mere sentiment. Madame de Castiglione, as an Italian, was for a united Italy. The Empress reserved the warmth of her very Spanish sympathies for the complete protection of the Holy Father's States.¹ On the contrary, the Princess Mathilde, who was a free-thinker and the strong brain of the imperial group, looked forward to the too long postponed day when Italy should at last be delivered from the Pope and the Court of Rome. Moreover, she was so much enamoured of Russia and of Russian diplomacy that everything emanating from St. Petersburg seemed to her to be dictated by

¹ After Villafranca she would have preferred a sort of confederacy, leaving Victor-Emmanuel in the north of Italy, the King of Naples in the south, and the Sovereign Pontiff in the centre.

the voice of reason. Alas! Her august kinsman, the Czar, had not yet extended his hand over Constantinople. No one used such heated language as the sister of Prince Napoleon in speaking of Europe's shame in allowing the barbarous Turk, with his religion of fatalism, to rule over millions of Christian subjects.

These conversations, however, were mere rufflings on the general surface of the polite talk of the moment, and quickly enough gave way to the less impersonal preoccupations of woman. For with the majority of these pretty and illustrious ladies such topics formed only a small portion of their conversation, which was in general only the frivolous talk of the fashionable world and Court slanders.

The case was different with Madame de Castiglione. Since she could not act the queen, she was burning to make kings act, and the idea of a "Greater Italy" was the real motive of her coquetry with Napoleon, and the object of her constant thought. The fervent desire for the realisation of that idea stirred in her the sacred fire. The finer sentiments of love, sacrifice, self-denial, scarcely left a ripple on her soul's surface; but she was haunted by proud and lofty aspirations. To be a kind of universal intermediary in great affairs, to correspond on politics with the ends of the earth, to interpret the dark sayings of diplomacy, to entertain, if only in imagination, extraordinary projects, to play a part, even though in secret, in the international game; these were the activities susceptible of arousing, exciting, and satisfying her passionate nature! For this she strove, increasing the number of her visits and relations, drawing up reports, distributing news to financial circles, and brewing magnificent designs.

This was, in truth, Madame de Castiglione's great

hour of political activity during the Second Empire. The close daily attendance on Victor-Emmanuel, which formed part of her husband's duty at the Piedmontese Court, allowed him to secure regular relations between the King and his wife.¹ This proved to be a real aid, since all the unofficial despatches between Napoleon and the Court of Sardinia were transmitted through her.

In the interval since the Countess's arrival in France, the famous and subtle Cavour had not been losing his time. It was he, it will be remembered, who had given her this important commission, and she cherished the liveliest admiration for his intelligence, his creative energy, and his genius.

When very young, he had dreamt of waking one day to find himself at the head of the kingdom of Italy,² but on opening his eyes in the morning he laughed his wild ambition to scorn. Yet what a distance he had come since then, and what a solid and tangible setting he had given to his fantastic vision! He had swept within the sphere of his own direct activity nearly all the offices constituting the Piedmont government, and had convinced his master of the superiority of his views, so that out of his preponderating personality (now at the head of so weak a kingdom) one saw emerging the future master of a great nation. His strength seemed to lie in the fact that by means of the documents emanating from his cabinet, and propagated by his friends, he was shaping European opinion; and whether he employed the resources of a persevering and adroit diplomacy, or whether he

¹ Although a separation had taken place, they had not ceased writing to each other on questions of politics and on private matters.

² Cavour, *Letters to the Marquise Baiolo*, published and unpublished.

went so far as to let the acts of foreign conspirators turn to the advantage of his own policy, certain it is that he enlisted every power, singly and collectively at his disposition, for the advancement of the Italian cause.

He had bided his time, and he now felt that his hour was approaching. Behind the multiple complications and byways of his clever scheming, he had understood how to appear so cautious as to seem almost timid; but now he showed himself, to the same degree firm in language, sure of the morrow, conscious of his strength, bold to the point of appearing foolhardy. He unmasked his plans with audacious frankness, and they demonstrated to all observant eyes that the moment had arrived for direct aggression.¹ France inclined to retard the consequences of such action, and Austria to escape them. The former showed no eagerness to see the duumvirate of Piedmont achieve its aim too quickly, while Austria maintained an attitude of prudence and reserve, feigning ignorance of the projects that were underway. Ah! if only Napoleon had heeded more complaisantly Cavour's repeated appeals and the tender hints of Madame de Castiglione, and had decided on an abrupt initiative! But the impetuosity of the former *carbonaro* had weakened, since the conspirator had become the head of a great State. In 1853 he had said, to the Marquis of Villamerina: "We must wait for the outbreak of a great war in Europe, or for some other event, to afford a favourable opportunity; such, for example, as Austria's threatening the independence of Piedmont."

Such an opportunity which Cavour had endeavoured,

¹ "We shall force the Cabinet of Vienna to declare war against us," he had intimated, in his own words, to the English diplomatist, O. Russell.

in so many ways, to bring about, did not arise as soon as he had wished. In truth, the House of Savoy had up to the present moment obtained from the Emperor of the French only verbal promises,¹ with precarious guarantees. Although from the moment that he had ascended the throne, he had adopted the logical "principle of nationalities" as the basis of his foreign policy, nevertheless Napoleon could not help cherishing certain apprehensions as to its consequences. He recognised that in increasing his neighbours' forces he risked enfeebling his own, and he hesitated therefore to fling himself into the adventure. His soaring imagination was held in leash by the practical experience of power. Moreover, while inclining with extreme generosity (without however informing his official diplomatic agents) to the successive offers of the Piedmontese minister, he held tenaciously to the idea that the war must be made to appear just in the eyes of the world. At the same time he expressed himself as agreeing with the minister on the three fundamental points—viz. the marriage,² the war with Austria, and the kingdom of Upper Italy. He considered it necessary that the motive for the war should appear not merely plausible, but well founded, and although so beset with prayers, propositions, and evasive threats, he was unable to make up his mind to provoke a conflict.

Italian agitators and revolutionaries, chafing at these delays, began to utter threats. If he chose to forget or deny engagements subscribed to in his youth, and on the

¹ In 1852 he had held out this hope to the Piedmontese Ambassador, de Villamerina: "Do not be uneasy, for the time is not far off when the two countries, France and Piedmont, will find themselves associated in arms for the noble cause of Italy."—Despatch from Villamerina, Feb. 1853, according to Bianchi, *Storia documentata*, vol. iii. p. 229.

² The marriage of the Prince Jerome and the Princess Clotilde.

fulfilment of which he had at the time staked life itself, then recourse must be had to violence to warn him that his breach of good faith would not go unpunished. The most ruthless were strongly in favour of getting rid of him altogether by means of pistol shot or dagger ; and in 1858 there followed a series of attempted assassinations, full of sinister meaning, in which the Emperor on several occasions stood face to face with death. Louis Napoleon well realised to what perils his compacts of former days with certain Italian secret societies were now exposing him. His was the case of a young man who airily signs a letter of credit during his minority and is called upon to pay it as soon as he comes into his estates. Attempts on his life—some known, others only guessed at—had served to enlighten him only too clearly on this point. It might have been supposed that they would cure him of his Italian sympathies. The contrary was the case. Though the public acts of French diplomacy might seem to imply a swerving from his projects in favour of Italy's emancipation, those most intimately acquainted with the secrets of the Emperor's private correspondence and personal opinions knew that he would not fail to carry out what they were pleased to term the "Orsini will." A number of forces worked together to precipitate his action, not the least of them being the bomb-throwing episode of the 14th January 1858, which was accompanied by a written summons to him "to undertake at once the greatest deed of his reign," and in the background the persistent nagging of the beautiful Mme. de Castiglione. The united powers, then, of fear and love ; the hopes voiced on both sides of the Alps and backed up by promises of reward ; finally, a movement of anger on the part of Austria who, after long and patient waiting, took upon

herself the responsibility of provoking hostilities—all these were causes contributing to bring about the decisive step so eagerly and so long awaited. A few months later from end to end of the Peninsula one phrase passed like wildfire from tongue to tongue, *l'Italie est la fille de Napoleon III.*

Mme. de Castiglione voiced loudly her delight. Every day fresh and glorious news came from Turin. On the 23rd April 1859, at the end of a parliamentary sitting remarkable for its patriotic enthusiasm, Cavour uttered these never-to-be-forgotten words, "To-day I leave the last assembly of the Piedmontese Chamber! Our next gathering will be in the Italian Parliament!"

Alas! the Peace of Villafranca came to cool this ardour. Piedmont, Victor-Emmanuel, Cavour, and Mme. de Castiglione had a rude awakening. The whole of Italy reaching to the Adriatic had been promised them. But scarcely had Napoleon brought his army into the field and reaped the reward of his early victories—victories which only a miracle saved from becoming terrible defeats—scarcely had he begun his work of liberator when, deceived by Prussia, threatened by the whole of Germany, he stopped short upon his path of triumph, unheeding either the protestations of Cavour or the outbursts of anger which assailed him from the whole Italian people. Either of his own free will, or because forced to do so, he had laid down his arms. After having engaged in this unnecessary war, exhausted by means of it a large part of his material wealth, and greatly diminished his European prestige, he knew the discredit attaching to those who leave incomplete a task they have undertaken.¹

Once peace was signed, Lombardy handed over to

¹ Pierre de la Gorce, *History of the Second Empire*, vol. ii. p. 308.

Italy, and Savoy and Nice added to the Empire as a reward of the French alliance, the only thing that remained for Napoleon was to return to Paris, carrying with him the conviction that the satisfaction he felt in turning his back on Italy was shared by those who saw him go. Victor-Emmanuel with an imposing escort accompanied him to Suze, the extreme terminus of the railway line. When he saw the coaches containing the Emperor and his staff disappear in the direction of Mont-Cenis and Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne, the ardent ally of the previous day, expressing the relief he felt in an outburst of ingratitude, cried, "At last he is out of the country!"

For those who had asked and expected too much, the disappointment was a bitter one. The Countess de Castiglione was of their number. As well hope to keep the thunder and lightning in the rain-cloud as to prevent her vexation from becoming articulate! Did she voice her grievances too loudly? That certainly was the feeling in Court circles, and her prestige visibly diminished at the Tuileries. Napoleon's personal attentions to her had no longer their early ardour. This was quickly noticed in the Imperial entourage, and the atmosphere of the "Château" speedily betrayed the change. Just a little while before the Empress had been annoyed by an act of daring rivalry on the part of the audacious Italian in the matter of dressing her hair, and in order to avenge the affront had, in the hearing of the guests at an official reception, given instructions that Mme. de Castiglione's portrait be removed from the Emperor's apartments, "where undoubtedly it had been placed by mistake." The portrait in question was unsigned, badly drawn, and faded in tone, but it arrested attention by reason of its expression—that of a woman ardently in love. It was quite enough honour for it, said the Empress, to figure

henceforth in the apartments of the Chamberlain Bacciochi on the ground-floor of the Palace.¹

Such was the beginning of a loss of royal favour which quickly assumed graver proportions. Suspicion was awakened concerning her. It was hinted that the beautiful Florentine received at her house Italian emissaries of doubtful character. People went even further. A rumour was set on foot of a plot formed at the house of this dangerous siren whose object was to assassinate the Emperor on the occasion of a certain visit he had promised to pay her. One of Napoleon's secret agents, the Corsican Griscelli, whose speciality was the investigation of vendettas, was accustomed afterwards to boast that having a presentiment of grave peril that night for the Emperor at Mme. de Castiglione's house in Passy, he asked and received permission to accompany him and General Fleury, his aide-de-camp. His record of what he was pleased to call their "adventure" was written with a pen dipped freely in the dark red fluid of melodrama. They had mounted the steps leading to the front door cautiously and on tip-toe, while he, Griscelli, whispered, "Take care, General! Remember we are at the house of an Italian woman!" Decoy, the gleam of a dagger, midnight tragedy, a dead body! It was indeed a blood-curdling story!

But the truth, stripped of all romance, was simply that at this time Mme. de Castiglione was being watched by the police. She was suspected of being in communication with the followers of Mazzini, and with some political refugees as little in favour with the French as they were with the Court of Turin. The memory was still vivid of those instigators of a cosmopolitan revolu-

¹ This picture, of which we reproduce a photograph not at all flattering to the original, was afterwards taken to the Ajaccio picture-gallery with the rest of the collection bequeathed by Bacciochi to his native town.

tion who, in 1851, had joined the provincial agitators in their insurrection. Finally, she was herself suspected of being a spy and, in a fury of rage, storming against the ingratitude of Napoleon, she was conducted over the frontier into Italy.

For the past three or four years Florence of the beautiful skies, verdant walks, and sun-bathed hills had been for her only a distant memory. Under the wholly unexpected circumstances of her present life, she found a new attraction in it, and settled down there to meditate in quiet seclusion over fortune's caprices and man's injustice—two things of which she had had bitter experience though not yet twenty years of age. In order to devote herself wholly to her son's education, she chose a house outside the city gates, standing in a country-like solitude, and commanding a magnificent view. There she found a gradually awakening peace of heart and soul. She had willed too high a flight; the things she had wished to do had been too great for her powers, and out of her ambitious projects only bitterness had come to her. Now, in this peaceful retreat, her agitated clutching at a vain glory began to seem to her like a fevered dream. She had finished with it for ever—at least so she thought, and would continue to think, until some new enthusiasm seizing her filled her once more with wild and impossible hopes of social influence.

It was in this mood of mildly melancholy self-effacement that she was found one day by a young French diplomatist who called upon her. She seemed to him so rare a vision, seen thus in a framework of unusual surroundings and emotions, that he made her, afterwards, the subject of many pages of fascinating description. Already, in the course of a preceding work,¹ where the

¹ Cf. Frédéric Loliée, *Women of the Second Empire*, pp. 23-25.

Countess de Castiglione was only a passing figure, we have cited this delightful account of her by d'Ideville ; and now in this book of which she is the centre and soul we venture to quote it again.

A rather steep ascent led up to the Villa Gloria. A wooden gate formed the entrance to this humble and somewhat dreary-looking dwelling. Between it and the house were garden paths which were, no doubt, gay enough in the spring and summer season when nature was at her brightest and best, but which certainly had no charm for the eye during the cold days of winter, lying there under their covering of snow, with the leafless trees standing sentinel above them. From the garden path the visitor reached the door of the porch. A black-clad servant opened it, and with a somewhat mysterious air escorted the visitor to the first floor where the Countess was usually to be found, either alone, or with her little boy playing at her side. He was a child of six years old, as gentle and pretty as a girl, with fair hair curling around his forehead, arms and shoulders bare, and large limpid eyes wide open and full of an innocent surprise.

Mme. de Castiglione seemed cold, reserved, and not inclined to utter unnecessary words. Her door remained closed to all her compatriots from Turin, Florence, or Genoa. She opened it but rarely, and only to foreigners, especially to French people. The first impression she produced could only be one of admiration, but an admiration of the eyes, unaccompanied by any feeling of warmth or magnetic attraction. Her face was more imposing than kindly. She had the haughty expression often found in women who have been long accustomed to fulsome adulation.

The young diplomat feasted his eyes on the perfect

purity of outline and harmony of form of this extraordinarily beautiful being, and then, his heart unstirred by any emotion, took his leave and descended the slopes to Florence with his friend and colleague, the Baron de Chollet, who had accompanied him on his visit.

A second, and then a third time he called upon her, only to find that his earliest impression of her remained unchanged. And he recalled the unfavourable opinions he had so often heard repeated about this curious woman.

"She is too beautiful," was the verdict of her social rivals, "and—very luckily—she is nothing else but beautiful!"

"She is profoundly selfish!" some of those who had flocked around her in the midst of her most brilliant Paris triumphs had added. They described her as capricious, incapable of real affection, and, in spite of the marvellous appeal of her person, incapable also of inspiring love in another. They almost went so far as to deny her the possession of average intelligence. D'Ideville, with these generous pronouncements fresh in his memory, revisited the Villa Gloria five or six times without being able to form any definite personal opinion on the subject of Mme. de Castiglione.

He found it hard, however, to believe that under this goddess-like exterior shone no spark of the divine fire. There was much about her which strongly excited his curiosity. The exile to which she had condemned herself, this woman whose appearance in Paris and London only a few years before had been an event of public importance; her retired life and systematic aloofness from all society; the cultivation of an air of mystery which later on became her constant habit; the utter indifference of this young creature to such

affairs of the outside world as might brighten her existence or break its monotony—all this caused him to think that surely she had hidden resources of the mind and soul unknown to the multitude. And in order to decide the point, he continued to mount the hill leading from Florence to her house.

He was beginning to lose all hope of solving the enigma, and had indeed resolved to think no more about it, when one day he found himself again climbing the steep road up to the Villa Gloria. Fate willed it that this time he was Mme. de Castiglione's sole visitor, and their *tête-à-tête* talk proved a revelation. The Countess broke away from the *banal* sentences and polite commonplaces to which she had hitherto limited herself in his presence, and showed herself a brilliant conversationalist. Her originality of thought revealed a lofty nature and a mental breadth which, up to that moment, he had hardly credited her with possessing.

Why had people painted her to him as being at the same time so rich in some things, so poor in others—in a word, so incomplete? He had only to listen while she spoke to recognise that she was infinitely the superior of most women in mind and character, while yielding to none in physical charm—a charm which the most prejudiced against her were forced to concede to her. Her melancholy and the disdain she felt for the rest of mankind arose doubtless from the early disappointment of her ambitious dreams.

“Scarcely have I crossed life's stage,” she said, “and yet my rôle is ended!”

He returned home, reflecting over all that he had heard. The charm had begun to work, and other and longer interviews followed. She became more confi-

dential, almost expansive, and he was deeply moved by these chats full of novelty. D'Ideville soon learned a large part of her life, and saw too that it added to her happiness to have at hand some one in whom to confide and who was capable of understanding her. They went on boating excursions together, and she poured out her memories to him in unison with the flow of the water beneath the oars, and with the fresh *naïveté* of a child. He could not deny himself the pleasure of writing out his impressions and of reading what he had written to her who had inspired them.

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But in spite of this diversion, the Countess de Castiglione grew impatient of the lessened pulse of life which she felt in and around her since she had been forced to quit France. Teaching her son the elements of foreign languages did not suffice to fill her days. She was too young, too full of life, to bear cheerfully the loneliness of exile. She was the victim of false accusations, and insisted on having her innocence established. With this object in view she journeyed to Turin, and begged the Count d'Arese, an old friend of Louis-Napoleon, to plead her cause. Employing one after the other prayers and hints resembling vague threats, she allowed it to be understood that she was the depository of veritable State secrets, the revelation of which would be, to say the least of it, annoying; that a less discreet person than herself would probably take advantage of the situation, and that it would be wiser, indeed, not to tempt *her* to do so by continuing to treat her harshly. This last consideration, added to the persuasive influence of memories of former days, produced the desired effect. The interdiction was removed, and shortly afterwards

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she inaugurated the era of her return to Paris by giving a grand fête.

From that time onward she passed her time between France and Italy, alternating mysterious departures with equally sudden returns. When in 1862 she reappeared at the Tuileries, she found but a waning interest taken in the Italian Question. The Chinese War and the partition of the spoils from the Summer Palace occupied all thoughts. Two years later she returned to Turin, and after a short stay there came back once more to Paris. During the following two or three years she travelled in different countries, and then, in 1867, revisited Italy on the occasion of the marriage of the Duke of Aosta, the Prince Amédée, with the Princess Marie del Pozzo della Cisterna.

It was a wedding full of tragedy, and through it the Countess de Castiglione became a widow. Never afterwards could she recall without a shudder the series of terribly painful and unexpected events attendant on this marriage.

Its flowers were bespattered with blood. Into the midst of the guests assembled there in gala dress came Death and, as if they were the hapless sport of some invisible and sinister fate, showered on them blow upon blow.

With such an unheard-of array of coincidences, and with such mechanical precision of touch, did the Death Angel strike, that in reading an account of the circumstances horror gives place to doubt. Is it really believable? May it not be that the Countess de Castiglione, naturally inclined to extremes of imagination as well as of temperament, dipped her brush in colours much too vivid on the evening when she sat down to paint the scene in a curious letter which lies before

me as I write, and from which I have taken the following narrative of this most extraordinary sequence of fatalities? ¹

The route from the royal palace of Turin to the church was but a short one. Nevertheless a catastrophe marked it, and the same was the case with the other divisions of this outwardly joyous ceremonial—the civil contract, and the religious rite. Each had its tragedy. The initial horror, one which alone would have sufficed to cast a gloom over the whole festivity, was the suicide of the Princess's first lady of the robes. The sad cause of her desperate act is not known, but she was found dead in the wardrobe, where she had hanged herself. In her clenched hand was the bridal gown, on which she had placed a wreath of flowers. The terrified Princess refused to wear the dress, but another was forthcoming in time, and the distressing affair was hushed up. At the appointed hour, the escort was formed in the courtyard. But the procession could not set forth without the colonel appointed to head it. He was late. People began to grow impatient. Suddenly the news arrived that he had had a sunstroke, and had fallen from his horse some three hundred yards from the palace and was dead. Without its recognised leader the cortège started in confusion.

When the gates of the royal château were reached it was found that, by some inexplicable negligence, the gatekeeper had forgotten to open them. A search was made for him, the gates were finally unlocked, and the pro-

¹ In reality this avalanche of misfortunes was not attendant on the Duke of Aosta's first marriage solely. The *jettatura* extended its baneful influence to his second marriage in 1888 with his niece, Princess Letizia, daughter of Jérôme Napoleon. The following passage from the letter already referred to testifies to this fact: "The best man at the wedding of the Frenchwoman and the Italian, a lawyer, blew out his brains, and his blood bespattered the wall."

cession passed on. The unhappy gatekeeper was afterwards found bathed in his life blood. How it happened is not known. Perhaps, terrified by the possible results of his neglect, he had imitated the desperate act of the famous Vatel. And so death succeeded death in the most incredible manner. Suddenly, a few minutes later, the court official who had drawn up the marriage contract was seen to fall backward against the cushions of his carriage, his face drawn and deathly white. He had succumbed to an apoplectic fit. The onlookers had not had time to recover from this shock, coming on top of so many others, when a pistol shot was heard in the distance. The best man had committed suicide by blowing his brains out. Horror-struck, the newly married couple made all haste to flee the accursed spot. In the midst of the crowd's acclamations and the playing of massed bands the carriages and their escort passed quickly down the tree-shaded avenue leading to the railway station. The royal party alighted and directed their steps towards the platform from which the train was to start for Stupinigi. With respectful loyalty, the station-master led the way. Just at the moment when he stepped on to the line itself, crossing from one platform to another, the bridal party's special train came thundering by, caught him under its giant weight and crushed him to death.

At this sight, Victor-Emmanuel, unable to bear more, and in the tone of an army chief giving the order to cease firing, cried out, "We have had enough deaths! Castion,¹ we take post-chaises and return all together, for I am terrified!" While the cortège took the road to Stupinigi in carriages, the Count de Casti-

¹ Friendly diminutive of Castiglione. "'Castion' is the pet name which the House of Savoy always gave to the House of Castiglione" (Letter clxxiii).

glione, in his red uniform of the Knights of Malta, rode on the right side of the carriage in which the young bride and bridegroom were seated. Suddenly he was seen to sway in his saddle. Another moment and he had fallen from his horse, rolling under the carriage wheels, while the affrighted horses reared and plunged. The procession stopped, and the Princes Humbert and Amédée hurried to his aid. The Princess, inside her carriage, fell back in a faint. The Count was dead, his breast-bone fractured by a wheel which had passed over him with such force as to bury in his flesh the Order of the Annonciade and the other decorations which he was wearing, and which had been bestowed on him that very day by the King in honour of the occasion. Nothing could be done for him; he had been struck by congestion of the brain. In the meantime the King's carriage, which had taken the lead, arrived first at Stupinigi. Victor-Emmanuel, awaiting the rest of the cortège, missed his aide-de-camp. "Where is Castion?" he asked. "Dead!" was the curt answer of Prince Humbert, who from that day forward conceived a horror which nothing could eradicate of the ceremonial attending official marriages.

With the Count de Castiglione¹ included, the number of the day's fatalities amounted to seven, and in addition to these may be mentioned two other victims of the ill-fate which dogged the steps of the royal family—to wit, a certain Prim, one of the King's attachés, who was assassinated very shortly afterwards, and an old nurse of one of the royal princes, who on the same day was scalded to death at Spezia by a boiler explosion.

¹ "I still keep the court sword which hung at his side, the decorations and chain collar which he was wearing, and the 3 fr. 40 c. which he had in his pocket."—*Private Correspondence*, clxxiii.

Such, according to an account given in a private letter by the Countess, were the fatalities which occurred in connection with this royal marriage—fatalities which resulted in nine deaths, one of which was an assassination and one a suicide.

For a few months she wore the mourning required by convention for the father of her child,¹ and then returned to Paris, where she was destined to watch the dying throes of the Empire during the last two years of its existence.

¹ “And this is how, when only seventeen, I was left a widow with a child to bring up in a foreign land, and penniless. Him, too, I was fated to see die later on, at the age of seventeen, on the occasion of his first Court commission as bearer of a letter from the former King of Spain to the new King. He died wearing the same uniform as his father at the dinner of the hundred and one guests.”—*Private Correspondence*, clxxiii.

Still other singular circumstances, but inexactly reported. Either wilfully, or accidentally, the Countess all her lifetime made mistakes in dates. She was not seventeen years old, but twenty-seven, when she lost her husband, from whom she had been separated for a space of ten years. Her son, whose death cost her so many tears, was not poisoned, as she hinted in many of her letters, but lost his life through an illness quite independent of men's evil machinations—smallpox.

CHAPTER IV

HER GLORIOUS DAYS

Journeys between Italy and France—The real reason of Mme. de Castiglione's many disappearances—Her most successful moment at the Imperial Court—What others said about her, and she about others—How she dazzled society when appearing at Court balls—The diverse judgments passed upon her by women and by men—A book of "testimonials"—Her meteor-like appearance in various *salons*—At the Tuileries: coldness between the Empress and the Countess; a dress rivalry and its results—At the Princess Mathilde's—At the Ministry for Foreign Affairs—At the house of the Duke of Morny—In the higher Jewish financial circles—At other Parisian houses—Amusing details concerning certain feminine rivalries—The "plain" and "beautiful" Duchess and Countess of the same name—Curiosity concerning the supposed sentiments of the Countess—The Emperor—Lord Hertford—The Princes—A daring conversation with Nieuwerkerke—Subjects touched upon in society talks—A near approach to tragedy in returning to Passy after a ball—The Countess de Castiglione's wealth of ideas in the matter of her own dress—Her fancy dress costumes—The Salammbô legend—Tableaux vivants stories—For the poor and for the love of art; two anecdotes—Nearing the close of these days of joyous amusement—The serious thoughts which caused Mme. de Castiglione's early forsaking of worldly pleasures—Her state of mind when, still under thirty years of age, the events occurred which brought about the Empire's fall.

To come too frequently before the eyes of the public tends to depreciate one's value. It behoves the stars of the social stage to limit their appearances and not tire their audiences, so as to keep fresh the spectators' admiration. No one ever understood this truth better than Mme. de Castiglione. As we have already seen, she loved, without announcing either her departure or her return, to appear and then suddenly to disappear. And by this means she kept social attention constantly fixed on her, or awoke it to fresh activity if it showed signs of languishing.

The reasons of her frequent absences from Paris, though she chose to surround them with mystery, were generally perfectly simple. Save for a few political missions, such as those in 1858 and 1859, where she had to treat by word of mouth with Victor-Emmanuel or Cavour, her journeys were undertaken to meet the necessities of her daily life, and had no enigma whatever attaching to them. Thus, for example, it was advisable for her to show herself from time to time in Italy, in order to justify in person her right to the pension attributed to her from the royal privy purse. So also she had to pay occasional visits to her "Mountain" (as she called her estates in Spezia), if only for the reason that she needed the rents collected from the farmers and peasantry there to keep up her costly and elaborate style of dressing. There were other considerations no less obvious that led her to revisit her native land at rather frequent intervals. But it pleased her vanity to throw a veil of secrecy and mystery over all she did and to play the rôle of sphinx.

She allowed it to be understood that there were reasons beyond the comprehension of ordinary, uninitiated folk which took her away from Parisian society; that, indeed, she was bound by State affairs of international interest and importance; that if at the Tuileries she had found favour in the Emperor's eyes, she was none the less welcome both in Spain and England; that she must often traverse the road which divided Holland House in London from Orleans House at Twickenham; that the two Courts of Piedmont and Sardinia claimed her services; that by reason of her close friendships with many royal personages, such as Queen Augusta and the Grand Duchess of Baden and her daughters, she was obliged to visit Germany

periodically; and that, as a matter of fact, not all her journeys were made in Europe itself, but that her wanderer's fate had pushed her farther afield into countries little known and into regions of wild adventure, whose names she refrained from mentioning.

The essential point for her was that, absent or present, people were thinking about her and discussing her; whether because she had just gone off on one of her trips, or because she had just returned from one of them, did not matter in the least. In the former case they said, "Now her rivals are happy; she has left them a free field." In the second case, they hinted that ambitious society dames "had better take care," that they must expect complications in the near future, for "the beautiful Countess" was back again.

Between 1856 and 1870 the dates of her appearances and disappearances can be fairly well determined. In 1857 she shone for a brief moment in the Parisian firmament and then was seen no more; in 1858 she seemed to be dematerialised; in 1859 a fleeting vision of her is again granted to the watchers; in 1860 and 1861, having no longer a rôle to play, or rather because constrained to inaction, she gives France no sign of her existence; in 1862 she returns once more; from 1864 on, new flights into the neighbouring country; and finally, from after 1868, she makes a fairly protracted sojourn in France, remaining there till the fall of the Empire.

At the Court, and in fact at whatever social function she was present, Mme. de Castiglione never failed to taste the joys of a notable triumph, until the time came when she of her own accord forsook these scenes of triumph, finding in them nothing but weariness, bitterness, and disappointment.

At the Tuileries during the days when the cult of her beauty was at its highest, the mere announcement of her name would cause a stir of interested excitement in this centre of cold ceremonial. The groups dissolved and their members pushed forward to get a glimpse of her. She, on the other hand, betrayed no emotion on such occasions, but received all this homage with the icy calm of her unchanging smile.

People gathered an exaggerated idea of her importance from the air of mystery which ever surrounded her. She was supposed to have inner information concerning European statecraft. Different Governments had conferred certain privileges on her. The diplomatic world was supposed to be her province. The Emperor, it was said, asked her advice in private. Without making any definite statement she allowed it to be understood that she was in active correspondence with the principal personages of foreign courts. And then there was the further attraction of the perfection of her physical charms. Amongst the many so-called beauties of her time she stood supreme. The majority of them had wrested their attractions from art by dint of long and painstaking effort, and between these hard-won charms and the natural gifts which Mme. de Castiglione possessed the difference was as that between night and day.

It was in vain that the hypercritical in the matter of female beauty scanned her person in detail, secretly wishing to discover some imperfection, some slight oversight of the Divine Sculptor. They had found themselves forced to acknowledge that everything about her was above reproach. In those conversations which had for their eternal theme the "fascinating sex," sceptics whose close observation had robbed them

of illusions might theoretically throw doubt on the question of feminine superiority in the matter of bodily perfections, emphasising the defects of that body of which woman is so proud because man desires it so much; they might tell of hidden infelicities that were given a semblance of grace by the device of dress; they might exhaust themselves in eloquence on this theme, but their arguments lost all force and effect when the Countess de Castiglione passed by with her air of haughty confidence, seeming to fling to them the challenge, "Look and judge." She was the exemplification of an absolute harmony between the ideal and the real, and they had to acknowledge that occasionally in nature, as in art, by a rare miracle the what we see is beyond the highest we had dreamed of. Willingly or unwillingly they crowned her queen of the charmers amongst her sex. As a tribute to her sovereignty flowers of rhetoric were offered her in profusion, especially by men to whose favourable judgment she appealed against the envious unkindness of other women. All sorts and conditions of men vied in doing her homage. Even the rugged Pélissier, Marshal of France and Duke of Malakoff, little accustomed as he was to finding himself in the company of rhymsters, waxed poetic in thinking of her, and wrote some bad verses in her honour.¹

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A custom in vogue among society ladies during the

¹ Here are the verses, copied out from the autograph original :—

" Le madrigal et la satire

Trouveraient à vous peindre un embarras egal ;

Car, qui parle de vous a meme peine a dire

Assez de bien qu'un peu de mal."

(A warrior in a train, returning from the Crimea, 1856, and inspired by the Graces.)

MARECHAL MALAKOFF.

Souvenir—to the Countess de Castiglione.

Second Empire (a custom which has not altogether died out in these days) was that of keeping an Album of Verse, Poetic Thoughts. To fill it artists, poets, and distinguished men in general were put under contribution, sometimes being required to write on the spur of the moment, and sometimes generously allowed time to meditate in privacy on their brilliant impromptus. It was a society craze with which drawing-room versifiers, at least, found no fault. They had invitations showered upon them, and were thoroughly flattered and spoilt in return for inscribing some autograph lines on white vellum. For it was especially verse, whether in the form of sonnet, couplet, or the lately introduced madrigal, that a lady preferred for her "Book of Thoughts." Just as in the time of Mme. de Pompadour each duchess had her pet "griffon," so no drawing-room was considered complete without its luxuriously bound Album lying on the table. Mme. de Castiglione, who had her own original way of doing everything, also possessed an Album, but hers was a "Book of Testimonials," duly drawn up and signed for her and in her praise. Unlike certain great ladies of her acquaintance she did not say to her guests, "Monsieur, you will give my friends and also myself infinite pleasure by inscribing on this blank page a motto, a distich, some verses, or whatever you please." Instead, she asked them for a formally worded statement certifying the pleasure they had experienced in looking at her or in talking to her. Among others, Thiers, Jérôme Napoleon, Caro, Nieuwerkerke, Lord Cowley, acceded to her request and gave the required testimony. But none of them wrote with such distinction of language and such ardent adulation as did the famous Berryer. The page is interesting. What woman, whether subject or queen, ever inspired a more eloquent

panegyric than is contained in the last few lines alone of this curious and hitherto unpublished document ?

“I hereby certify for all present and future generations that neither the noble carriage of the Countess de Castiglione, nor her wondrously perfect beauty, her radiant youth, her unique position in the world, her glorious mouth, nor her eyes, shining or sad, express the whole of that wit, intellect, goodness, tenderness, and rare intuition which she possesses.—BERRYER.”

The first time that Berryer ever saw the Countess they met in the twilight, and in the dark entrance-hall of a house to which he often went as an intimate friend of the family. Her regal walk and air had aroused his admiring wonder ; but he was considerably astonished when addressing him she said, “If you are willing to wait here until they condescend to open the door, I am not. Tell them that I went away, but am returning to-morrow.” Yes, but as she had not disclosed her identity, how was he to execute her commission ? He made inquiries, and learned that he had undoubtedly made the acquaintance of Mme. de Castiglione ; that in that house they regarded her as one of themselves, and that the men of the place—and even the women—greatly admired her. He expressed a wish to be presented to “Her Royal Strangeness.” It was granted, and they found their natural mental affinity complete. And thus began between the great orator and the Countess a pure, unaffected, and lasting friendship, which was of a charm and tenderness which Berryer’s great age safeguarded and intensified. His imagination enthroned her in the empyrean.

But, as we remarked a little while ago, nature had showered upon her at birth the gifts of a too great

beauty, and she allowed this to be felt. In spite of herself, and quite probably without any fixed intention on her part, her very walk denoted a haughtiness of character which did not at all commend her to feminine sympathies.

She did not value highly the society, conversation, or character of her sex, and took no trouble to hide her feelings in the matter. Superior in intelligence to many of the so-called society beauties of her day whose sensibility was confined to material joys, she was sparing of flattering speeches where they were concerned. It is not at all surprising that they returned like for like and repaid her disdain with multiple pin-pricks. The members of the Court circle saw with little favour her eccentricities of manner, the mystery of her life, and her reticence as to her real feelings. Truth to tell, scarcely any one in that gay world felt, from the Empress down, any friendliness for her. The fair Spaniard whom Napoleon had taken by the hand and raised to his own royal state seemed incapable of a feeling of envy where mere physical beauty was concerned, because she was herself so richly dowered by nature in that respect; on the contrary, she loved to group pretty women about her as a foil to her own loveliness. But she never manifested the least desire to include the lustre of Mme. de Castiglione's shining in that constellation of which she was the centre. From the first she had divined in her the presence of ambitions towards a more direct and essential rivalry, and she could not brook the presence of so arrogant a companion. Some one has asserted that the Countess made a veritable idol of the Empress. Who was it? I cannot say, but it must surely have been a writer of romance—Zola perhaps—who knew nothing of her save what his

imagination revealed to him. On more than one occasion the audacious Countess wounded the susceptibilities of the Empress as sovereign and as wife, or even as a mere woman, with a woman's natural pride in dress. Eugénie could not forgive her for having been the object of more attention on the Emperor's part than was altogether fitting, for affecting at Court theatrical tastes and singularities of behaviour, and for having, so to speak, challenged her to combat in the question of manners, appearance, and clothes. There was one especial incident of a rivalry in coiffures (we have already alluded to it) which almost brought about Mme. de Castiglione's exclusion from Court functions.

Under the Second Empire the fashionable evening head-dress required an addition to one's own hair of a luxuriant supplement of false tresses, and the *coiffeurs* of the time exhausted all their powers of imagination and art. Though not as complicated as were those of the famous Leonard of eighteenth-century renown, who built veritable architectural monuments on the heads of his fair clients, these chignons had their own originalities, and success or failure in inventing and in wearing them was a grave matter for jealous emulation. A distant descendant of the famous Champagne, a certain Leroy, worked marvels in the service of the Empress. He was ingenious, zealous, and inventive. One morning when he was engaged in doing the Empress's hair, she urged him to surpass himself on the occasion of the next Court ball. He promised her Majesty a coiffure altogether worthy of her. He immediately undertook the task, and after much study and effort created the masterpiece which was to be the crowning-point of his career. He had the happy certainty that it was indeed a *chef-d'œuvre*, majestic,

delicate, and original—in a word, the best thing of its kind ever done. Thereupon, quite unexpectedly, the Countess de Castiglione informed him that she had decided to entrust him with the making of a chignon coiffure for her. Up to this time she had trusted to her own inspiration in these matters. She it was who introduced the fashion of arranging feathers in the form of a coronet on the hair, a style which made her appear taller than she was, and at the same time harmonised with her stately beauty. But now, under the influence of some fantastic whim, she declared that she must have exactly the same model as the Empress for her next head-dress, and insisted that Leroy should begin making it for her without delay. Leroy at first refused, pointing out respectfully but firmly that her Majesty would be exceedingly annoyed if she saw on the head of some one else a “creation” which had been intended for her alone, and that he would never dare to give her such just cause for displeasure. But the Countess clung to her caprice. She pleaded with Leroy not to refuse her this satisfaction, appealing to his sentimentality, his vanity, and finally succeeded in obtaining what she desired by promising him on her woman’s word of honour that she would only use the coiffure after the evening of the ball, on a quite different occasion. He finally yielded, believing these promises sincere, and the next day sent her the wished-for coiffure—shining, light, magnificent, like the other. He might have known what would happen. Mme. de Castiglione made all haste to wear it on the evening of the great ball, and to the extreme surprise of those present two coiffures alike in every respect faced each other. It was only the next day that the Empress gave vent to her anger when she called the unfortunate hairdresser before her,

scolded him roundly, and informed him that henceforth she would dispense with his services. As a matter of fact, she replaced him by the cleverest of his pupils, the cautious Alexandre.¹ Poor Leroy, who was a perfect courtier in his own way, fell ill through the shock. He contracted a lingering illness which brought him to death's door.

This was not the only time that Mme. de Castiglione had "ruffled" the Empress—if the play upon words may be permitted—in the matter of toilet. The Empress, as is well known, openly favoured the introduction of wide and outstanding skirts, and when the Emperor teased her about it she answered that she could not think how she had dared to live so many years without a cage. But the Countess, of too independent a nature meekly to copy the prevailing fashions, was one of the first to rebel against the cumbersome and ungainly steel crinoline, favoured though it was at Court and in the world outside. She was thirty or forty years in advance of her time in liking the straight flowing narrow robe which follows the lines of the body and seems a woman's natural lines, appearing to live with the wearer and to be part of her. Obviously in everything, or nearly everything, there was a want of agreement between the highest lady of the land and this relentless opponent.

There were other feminine eyes in the circle surrounding the Empress which looked upon the Countess with coldness; the ladies-in-waiting, sharing the feelings of their mistress with regard to her, made her aware of it by studied neglect and discourtesy of which she could not fail to be conscious. The following note written by her on the margin of a book,² which chance

¹ This incident was related to me by a Court lady whose hair Alexandre used to dress.

² On the margin of *Souvenirs sur la cour des Tuileries*, by the Countess Stéphanie de la Pagerie.

has brought under our notice, bears witness to the truth of this statement :—"The Ladies of Honour (the 'Ladies of Dis-honour,' I say) whose duty it was to serve tea did not offer me any, but I got the Countess de la Moskowa to offer me some."

Among her openly declared rivals or secret enemies in the same Court circle were several Frenchwomen, whose names we refrain from giving for fear of overburdening the list, and also some foreigners. One of the latter was an Italian of a beauty almost equalling hers, the bewitching Amazélia Manara.¹ There were also a Russian, the fascinating Mme. de Korsakof, she whose daring costumes had provoked much comment in St. Petersburg, Paris, and Berlin; another goddess from a neighbouring country, the Countess de Mercy-Argenteau, a blonde of dazzling complexion and fine figure, given to assuming statuesque poses; and a native of Fribourg who had become Italian through marriage, the Duchess Colonna de Castiglione;² to all of these she was an object of aversion.

It was Mme. de Korsakof who, at a fancy-dress ball in 1866, meeting the Countess de Castiglione dressed in the stately robes of the "Queen of Etruria," cruelly remarked, "A pretty costume, but that of a deposed queen."

The Duchess Colonna de Castiglione, well known as a society sculptor under her pseudonym of "Marcello," disliking to be mistaken for the beautiful Mme. de Castiglione, was accustomed to say playfully when giving her name to a servant, "You may announce the 'plain one'"; which little jest, however, did not at all prevent

¹ Daughter of the composer, Pacini, and adopted by the Countess Samoyloff, under whose guardianship she married.

² Born at Fribourg in Switzerland. Her maiden name was d'Affry.

her having the conviction that her moral force and artistic genius quite redeemed any physical inferiority she might have in comparison with her lovely namesake. With what warm appreciation they spoke of each other to be sure! Here is an illustration of the cutting, insulting bitterness our Mme. de Castiglione showed when writing about the other one, the Duchess.

“She was my double only in name—a Swiss of the incapable maid-servant type. Her only merit was an effort at wit when she cried to the Tuileries ushers, ‘Announce the plain-looking one.’ In that way people would know at once that it was not the other Mme. de Castiglione, the beauty; and they would not turn round or jump on chairs to look. Of course. But when she went shopping in the Rue de la Paix she took care to cover her face with a veil, preferring to be mistaken for me, and leaving me to pay. We had a lawsuit over it.”¹

Decidedly the Countess de Castiglione did not cultivate feminine friendships with any special ardour.

When not in the mood for it, the last thing she troubled about was to show amiability towards young or old. As one of the lions of the moment, she received invitations to many homes. She usually accepted with a bad grace, arrived late, disinclined her hosts to a second invitation by preserving throughout the dinner or luncheon an air of ungracious sulkiness. A story told about her by the wife of one of the imperial prefects is to the effect that, having accepted an invitation to dinner, she appeared at the end of the meal, and gave as her excuse that she had been at the races, that she had had errands, and that she had not been able to arrive earlier on account of the Emperor. Such incidents, of course, left an unpleasant impression of her character.

¹ Letter cxxiv.

Members of her own class, women especially, were disposed to find her lacking in heart, and almost in intellect. The Countess de Castiglione, they said, was one of those fortunate beings on whose birth heaven and earth had smiled, endowing her with all physical perfection, but neglecting her heart and soul. Had she any wit? They hardly thought so. Their opinion of her seemed to trouble her but little. Women, she thought, generally exhibit pettiness, spite, or envy in pronouncing judgment on one another. She was satisfied to do without praise from her own sex, knowing herself rich in the admiration of men, and that all artists worshipped her loveliness. Later on, towards the close of her life, she showed herself much more sensitive to the good opinion of the gallery, but that was at a time when scurrilous stories concerning her had taken such deep root as materially to injure her reputation. For the moment, it was enough for her that those who looked on her instinctively voted her a queen.

The more she drew her cloak of reserve about her, the more she increased the curiosity of the Court newsmongers, who were deeply disappointed to find themselves in ignorance of her secret service work, her motives of action, and her private likes or dislikes.

Now, curiosity is nothing more nor less than an elementary knowledge desirous of further enlightenment. As the Countess chose to keep her life hidden from the gaze of the public, people exerted themselves to guess at, if need be to construct out of their imaginations, that which neither her words nor her manner revealed to them. Those to whom physical beauty and sensual enjoyment are one and the same fruit plucked from a single branch, were amazed at her freedom from

the entanglement of several love affairs carried on simultaneously. Nature in forming her, they said, had fashioned an incomplete work. Or, rather, they expressed themselves as not being deceived by her apparent coldness, and endeavoured to find a hidden meaning for it. Angry at finding comparatively few scandalous adventures to relate about her, they invented some expressly for her, or else adapted to her those told about others.

Thus it was taken to be as good as certain that she had been the friend of Napoleon III., and knowing the Emperor's temperament, no one challenged the fact. She, however, never confessed to it, and often contradicted it. Both in writing and speaking she sought to prove that their relations had been solely intellectual; but her protestations would be greatly shaken, if I were to compare certain indiscreet conjectures, if I were to place under the magnifying-glass a certain phrase contained in her last Will and Testament¹—above all, if I could quote (but that is out of the question) a terrible saying of hers about "her emperor," of such precision as to leave nothing unexpressed.²

But reports concerning Mme. de Castiglione and her probable attachments were not limited to this imperial intimacy; there was talk, and with some likelihood of truth, of a brief *liaison* between the fascinating Italian and Lord Hertford, one of England's wealthiest

¹ The phrase in which she gave orders to be robbed for burial in: *the nightdress of Compiègne, of cambric and lace, 1857.*

² One day, at a great military review, Napoleon III., at the head of his marshals, made a fine appearance. He wore the great riband of the Legion of Honour across his uniform, and sat his stirrups in good form. At this moment, whether out of malice, whether possessed by an irresistible desire to speak plainly, she leaned over to Sainte-Beuve, who was sitting next to her, and whispered a word into his ear. He lost no time in transmitting it to his secretary, Jules Troubat, and it was the latter who one January evening, 1912, told the word to me.

peers, a Knight of the Order of the Garter, who, in addition to his titles, possessed the magnet of his millions. She had known him in society, and, judging by a number of original notes in pencil, well enough to take his measure. In particular, she declares him to be most faithful to the elastic device of the Order—*Honi soit qui mal y pense!* She bestows praise upon him for his exquisite manner to women, but finds nothing else in him to praise, and she adds that he lavished offers upon her, though she fails to indicate her answer to them. Evil tongues in search of anecdotes were less cautious, inasmuch as they arranged the details, declaring without hesitation (likewise without clear proof) that this multi-millionaire, one of the least generous of men, had laid a fabulous present at the Countess's feet: nothing less than a file of bank-notes, of incredible thickness and value, to obtain one kiss from her—to be followed by others.

Certainly, Lord Hertford was a strange being! Generous he never was, though he was sometimes capable of being lavish. But even then only with deliberation. No one could have been less liberal than he in the ordinary affairs of life: indeed, he was miserly to an extraordinary degree.¹ His invitations were restricted to a view of his collections and of himself, and his tastes and habits prevented him from giving dinners. One hears of an unheard-of exception in the case of a person who called upon him at the luncheon hour, to whom he had offered a chop and a place at the table opposite him. Once his surgeon, Phillips, who for years treated him for cancer of the bladder (of which he died), managed to secure some soup in guise of a meal; but he was conducted to the door by an intimate friend

¹ Cf., on the parsimony of Lord Hertford, the *Journal* of the Goncourts.

of the house—as far as any intimacy within those inhospitable walls was possible—who explained to the famous practitioner, inclined to think nothing of it, what a great exception had been made for him. It was said of Hertford that he was as bilious as he was stingy, and the possession of all the treasures of earth had not tempered his harshness nor altered his aversion to mankind. Judging his neighbour by himself, he is reported to have said one day: “All men are bad, and when I die I shall, at least, have the consolation of having never rendered a service to any one.” (However, it might be advisable to take this for a freak of temper.)

The malady which tortured him and which he bore with cold stoicism was probably the cause of his excess of spleen. His son, Richard Wallace, inherited his gold, his pictures, and Bagatelle (that charming property in the Bois de Boulogne); reserving the right not to accept the legacy of his temperament and feelings. We shall return later on to Lord Hertford's idiosyncrasies. Meanwhile, it is enough to note that my heroine, the Countess, had her heart but very slightly touched, notwithstanding the million she is said to have received from him in exchange for her supposed consent.¹

To return to those attachments which were Mme. de Castiglione's by choice, those who were curious in such matters mentioned Ch. Laffitte and Alphonse de Rothschild. The former acted as an agreeable companion in one of her flights to the land of the sun, while in her relations with the other she was able to gain his powerful financial support with regard to Italian affairs. Such were the rumours, while their propagators were waiting to give ample room on the list to the names

¹ Viel-Castel guarantees this; but of Viel-Castel, what is one to believe or not believe?

of the Duke d'Aumale and the Duke de Chartres; and naturally these names were not the last ones. Anecdotes were then the rage, and the imagination had full play with so flexible a subject, where everything might be proposed and inferred and nothing proved. And what was there to talk about at Court if hypotheses were out of order? It followed that Mme. de Castiglione, being the most envied, was spared the least.

She on her part gave full rein to the feminine propensity for getting at the secrets of others, of keeping oneself informed of one's friends' and acquaintances' moral twists and failings. Her inquiries on such vulgar weaknesses put her into the way, first, of knowing about them, and then of amusing herself, and the upshot was that she felt only a little more disdain than usual for those about her. Nevertheless, she spent a good deal of herself and of her time on this society which she affected to look down upon. Some twenty years afterwards she seems to have dropped it from her memory; for about 1888 she proudly protests in one of her letters that during her phase of imperialism, when she was about twenty, she had scarcely gone anywhere except to the Tuileries and to the British Embassy.¹ But really in writing thus she cancelled, with a stroke of the pen, too many delightful souvenirs: she forgot the majority of those great Parisian houses which not to have visited from time to time at that period would have caused her the keenest regrets. She would have been surprised and vexed, for instance, had she not been asked to the Palais-Royal, to the friend of her childhood in Florence, and of her whole life, the Prince Napoléon. Nor did

¹ Lord and Lady Cowley had received the young Countess very sympathetically.

she in those days flee from the receptions at the Petit-Luxembourg; and still less from the Duke de Morny's attractive *soirées*. There haughty formalism was excluded, sprightliness and good form ruled, and among the guests of this protector of the arts she was sure in advance of calling forth the admiration of the "select few." As is well known, this hospitable house opened its doors to the successful painters, sculptors, authors. In the great hall of the Presidency it was worth while noting the interest with which the Gérômes and the Cabanels regarded Mme. de Castiglione: how their attention was fixed by the perfections of her arms, her bosom, her waist. The artist world gathered round her; she excited their curiosity. Their eyes followed each of her movements, as if with the object of discovering a more intimate or more precise revelation of her charm. For all her careless air she was secretly enchanted, though she betrayed no sign. It certainly was the mainspring of her artistic feeling, the sense that she was able in herself to satisfy the artist's eye. Sometimes she would reply to the mute questioning of their glance: "You would like to see my arm?" and thereupon drew back the lace sleeve which half hid the pure outline. "Is it my foot you want?" And slightly lifting her skirt, she showed the faultless ankle. In her own house, as they knew, Mme. de Castiglione received with bare feet, and she wore rings on her toes and gold bands on her ankles. One would have said these feet had never known how to walk, so trim and delicate were they.

Admirers of her beauty were not lacking either at the Princess Mathilde's, for thither she repaired both day and night. In the daytime she visited her Imperial Highness in her studio, while the Princess handled her brushes, keeping at her task as if her bread depended

on finishing it; and in the evening she returned to find the Emperor's cousin holding her Court in diadem and gala.

It was at a reception given by the Princess Mathilde that Mme. de Castiglione was first revealed to the Parisians. It was to the Sardinian Minister, the Marquis of Villamarina, that she owed her invitation. "Her like will never be known again!" . . . One look at her, and surprise became amazement. Without letting a single day pass, the zealous Bacciochi had reported the general impression as well as his own to the master whom he served in diverse ways from sunrise to sunrise. In terms that could not fail to excite the Prince's attention, he described her long blue eyes with black circles, and their expression of subjugating assurance; her pure colouring; her abundant and wavy hair shading into gold; the faultless lines which made her whole being appear a living perfection. This picture alone had more than half seduced the Emperor, and he risked being entirely captivated when he gave the order to inscribe the Countess de Castiglione on the list both of the general and the special invitations: this was placing her in the same rank with the ambassadors.

Mme. de Castiglione's circle which a moment ago she told us was so restricted, extended quite beyond this princely company, for she did not scorn to put her imagination and coquetry to work for the brilliant entertainments in costume, given by Mme. de Meyendorf, the Countess de la Pagerie, and in particular by Mme. de Chasseloup-Laubat. One of the most famous of these fêtes took place at the Ministry of Marine. The masterpiece on the programme was the procession of the "Four Quarters of the Globe," symbolised by the fairest women of the Court circle. They were mounted on

floats that were drawn by or had grouped about them men and women. Princess Mathilde took the part of Anne Boleyn, her costume having been drawn from Holbein's picture by Eugène Giraud, her painter-in-ordinary. The ravishing Countess Edmond de Pourtalès passed as an Oriental dance-girl, while Mme. de Metternich, far from being as beautiful, had, by the help of her wit and aristocratic bearing, given herself all the airs of a lady of Louis XVI.'s Court. Cosmopolitan society was abundantly represented. A fair Polish lady, then much to the fore, attracted general attention. It was Mademoiselle Laure Sweikowska, later the Marquise de Noailles, who had transformed herself into an Egyptian, with a scarab head-dress. And there too was the strange Russian beauty, Mme. Rimski-Korsakof, who adapted her majestic form to a Roman empress, while Mme. de Castiglione appeared as an acacia, the simple flower that in its freshness put to shame the whole display of diamonds.

The Countess might often be found with the Baroness Alphonse de Rothschild, either in winter at the latter's fine house in the Rue Saint-Florentin, or, in summer, in the Rothschild gardens at Boulogne. The Baroness had married the eldest son of James, the founder of the Parisian house, and no social functions of the time in Paris were more appreciated than those that took place in Talleyrand's former *hôtel*, the Rothschild residence. The mistress of the house possessed a peculiar tact and talent in selecting and in varying her guests: inviting now the Imperialists, or again mingling the best of foreign society with the sulky aristocrats of the *ancien régime*. Her immense fortune was not the only attraction possessed by Laure de Rothschild. She combined with her exquisite English colouring and grace the typical

beauty of her race, and the result was a special and a piquant charm. One of her favourite pleasures was private theatricals. When such performances were being planned in her presence she would become unusually animated, but generally she wore an air of dreamy, far-away melancholy, though her near-sightedness perhaps partially accounts for this, in blurring the distant spectacle. She had never completely lost her German accent, nor yet certain ideas, certain accepted standards, not to say prejudices, that betrayed her origin ; but these characteristics in no way dimmed her genuine spiritual beauty, compounded of gentleness and tactful generosity. She was a great friend of Mme. de Metternich and of the Countess de Pourtalès, but with Mme. de Castiglione she was not on terms of intimacy. It was rather the men of the family, the powerful barons of Jewish finance, who appreciated and followed in the train of the Italian Countess.

Wherever Mme. de Castiglione put in an appearance, she commanded instant attention : whether at the Tuileries, in the apartments of the Louvre, at Nieuwerkerke's, in the *salon* of Princess Mathilde, or in the *salons* of the Countess Walewska, and of the Duke de Morny. She could neither escape the flood of compliments nor the puns and *doubles ententes* : the latter not always in good taste, and frequently carried too far by some, who could not resist seasoning their admiration with the spice of licence. When repartee became somewhat too vivacious she would take refuge behind her fan, but she never deserted her post. Usually she presented a brave front to the attacks of insipid gallantries. Besides, her companions knew that a rather free jest would not vex her beyond bounds : after all, what did such a jest amount to ? Words, nothing but words,

and she possessed an indulgent ear. Unlike a society coquette, under similar circumstances, who would feign to recoil in fright, she would listen tranquilly and at her ease to a discourse that might be seasoned with pepper and champagne. Sometimes even, when the fancy took her, she diverted herself by provoking just that kind of talk. I risk giving a single example.

She used sometimes to wander at night over the roofs of the Louvre with the then superintendent, Nieuwerkerke. One day, after the hour of closing, he undertook to act as her guide among the nude masterpieces of antique plastic art. They exchanged comments, she asking questions, he replying and developing bold suppositions. In Florence she had been accustomed from her youth to look upon the nude and life-like figures in the palaces and museums; and thus having grown up in a land where the sentiment of the natural in life harmonises with the atmosphere of art, she was not to be disconcerted by the plastic representation of the real. With entire simplicity she asked how it was that the Greek sculptors, in their statues of superior human beings, of gods or heroes, which on the whole gave one an impression of strength and power, so often produced a certain poverty of proportion in the apparent virility of the body? And Nieuwerkerke had been obliged to give her the reasons—his reasons—though he hastened to add that these, after all, proved nothing.

There are subjects that modern conventions and good form wrap up in all sorts of ingenious circumlocutions, but Mme. de Castiglione had no repugnance to the plain speaking of an older time. Viel-Castel might have told a tale of that, and he spoke of collecting specimens of the kind of thing that the beautiful

Italian's ears could tolerate. The instances that he had already begun to inscribe in his notebook were certainly sufficiently daring.

At this amiable Court the tendency to express one's self frankly, whether by word of mouth or in letters, was general. When among themselves, its members took little pains to disguise their impressions, but gave utterance to them, without embarrassment, as they rose to pen or lips.¹ Conversation varied, increasing or diminishing in freedom according to its closeness to, or distance from, the cold zone of formality surrounding the Empress. Close to this ceremonial atmosphere, the talk would not have allowed itself the pace it took beyond that boundary-line, though perhaps in corners, without sinning against deportment, it became more daring and gallant, not to say *graveleuse*.

The austere ones formed a party by themselves, preaching domestic virtue, sulking and avoiding the frivolous gatherings. They were left, unregretted, to their moody reflections. Chattering and laughter and amusement went on better without them, and pleasure reigned everywhere—where they were not!

So the Countess de Castiglione succumbed to the general easy-going insouciance surrounding her, breaking in her disposition, bending her pride, and making herself forget what, in a broader and higher sphere,

¹ But here is a sample of another pitch, a little glimpse of the heedless ease with which the cousin of Napoleon III.—among other great ladies—was capable of putting her thoughts into words, even under grave circumstances. She had just been told of the death of the Queen of Portugal. Immediately Princess Mathilde dipped her pen in the ink to announce the sad news to a friend of hers.

“That fat Doña Maria a *opéré sa crevaison* [managed to ‘bust up’]. May it do her great good! On returning to Paris we shall be in mourning for a fortnight. So provide yourself with a black dress for the morning, and a white evening dress.” (Unpublished letter from the Princess Mathilde to the Countess Ratomska; stamp of the Palace of Fontainebleau.)

she had so ardently desired to be, to do, to become. To be sure she considered herself out of her place, everywhere and at all times, yet she yielded to the suggestions of her youth and gave herself up abundantly to the pleasures of a society toward which she turned a disdainful countenance.

In an eminent degree she was a flower of the night, and she was a late-blooming flower. Whether there was dancing or not, she generally arrived late, distributed her time according to the company, and consulted only her own pleasure as to the fitting hour for returning to her house in Passy. This suburb of Paris, where nowadays high and massive structures are closely pressed and crowded together, seemed fifty years ago isolated and remote. Not always, on returning thither at night, did the Countess escape dangerous encounters: for instance, in one of her letters, she recalls an incident which gave her a bad shock, and which might have had grave consequences. She was coming home from a grand ball at the Tuileries, very much *décolletée*, enwrapped in a cloud of lace and muslin,¹ her neck, arms, and bosom loaded with pearls and turquoises, and having no one with her in the carriage. The coachman she always employed, her "Moor," as she called him, drove a white horse harnessed to the victoria (the only victoria, she asserted, which had permission from the police to enter the Tuileries, day or night). They were ascending the Trocadero hill, then a region of brushwood and weeds and lonely spaces, frequented at night by homeless vagrants. Suddenly the carriage stopped, and the lantern went out. Mysterious assailants unharnessed the horse, seized the whip, and put

¹ Evening dresses were mostly made of tulle and lace. It required great care in getting in and out of a carriage not to crush these light materials.

the driver to flight. To the Countess, however, no other harm was done than to leave her there in the darkness. Thereupon through this wild and unlit Passy she walked bareheaded, without a cloak, her satin shoes slipping on the icy snow. At last she reached Dr. Blanche's door, with clothes torn, out of breath, and shaking with cold. (It was here that Dr. Blanche had opened his sanitorium, in the healthful air, under the trees.) As soon as they heard of what had taken place, friends from the neighbouring villas hastened over: Jules Janin, among others, who assiduously held her beautiful hands, pressing them between his own and affectionately tapping them to warm them, while doing his utmost to calm her. They advised her not to go home till the next day, so for the rest of the night she remained among the lunatics. It would be malicious to say that she felt at home there; but at least she always preserved a happy memory of the famous alienist. "From that time," she affirms at the end of her letter, "dates my great and intimate friendship with the Blanche family, the father, the son, and successors." But what a way to end an evening, and what an adventure for a ball-dress!

I repeat, the Countess de Castiglione in full dress, especially in costume, marked a date in the history of Parisian society. In the art of dressing she had an imagination fertile in surprises. Whether she chose an artful simplicity to astonish those who were looking for the opposite effect, whether she aimed at producing a sensation, there was invariably an original note, graded off to a slight eccentricity, which at once marked her out.

At one moment her coquetry led her to put under contribution the gardens of nature rather than the jewellers' caskets. She would even content herself with a single wreath of eglantine, carelessly tangled in her hair; and, indeed, she had a preference for adorning herself with flowers, and the utmost concession she would make to worldly vanity was to allow some brilliants to be sown, as it were, among the blossoms. Again, she would employ the dark, as well as the glittering, precious stones to dazzle the beholders with flame and fire. Her taste was not infallible, but singular, rather, and daring; and if sometimes it produced pleasing and unexpected results, on the other hand the extravagant desire for effect led her to make eccentric combinations, to force a union between the most ill-assorted decorations and between colours impossible to bring into harmony, such as yellow and pink. In general, she favoured a bold cut, a suggestive style of gowns.

Certain masked costumes that Mme. de Castiglione wore at the Tuileries, or in receptions at the Ministries, became famous: among them the "Queen of Hearts," which she displayed at Mme. de Walewska's. As a Bohemian sorceress she had liberally distributed the symbolical attribute all over her attire, but notably in the neighbourhood of the waist, a region with which the heart has nothing to do. Also there were other costumes which afforded the guests at the latest ball abundant material for gossip. But the most celebrated of them all, the one that, so to speak, gave the hallmark to the glory of the incomparable Florentine, was the legendary costume of Salammbô—the one she never wore.

During the winter of 1864, a fortnight before the

Court ball, a rumour got abroad that the "Italian" would be present audaciously draped only in a wimple of violet gauze, such as the Carthaginian virgin used to envelop her marvellous body when she went to demand the sacred veil of the Temple of Tanit from the barbarian chief. This piece of news was so often repeated that everybody ended by believing it.¹ Meanwhile, Mme. de Castiglione's small and delicate feet, on which she prided herself, had been seen beautifully and appropriately covered, as usual: they did not make their toes jingle with the rings they were supposed to wear, but modestly hid themselves in the conventional shoe. Salammbô's diaphanous tunic had been only a dream; for alas! truth to tell, the Countess had appeared in a high-necked gown of black velvet, embroidered in gold and covered by an overskirt of cloth-of-silver: all very rich, but extremely correct. She had made her choice with the help of the princely singer, Mario di Candia. They had worked out the details together. Thus she had appeared in the *Salle des Fêtes*, a royal and majestic vision, as she had intended—a contrast, indeed, to the voluptuous incarnation that had been anticipated. The general astonishment was mixed with some regrets, but the greatest admiration was forthcoming for the noble and sumptuous effect produced. Yet, notwithstanding the protests of "the Queen of Etruria," the legend persisted.² In the

¹ It was Mme. de Korsakof who appeared as Salammbô, and her photograph was placed in the series of those costumes that were considered remarkable at the time. But this costume, which caused such a pother, was as proper as it was elegant.

² Here follows a letter of vindication from the Countess's regular photographer, "old Pierson," who omits no detail. With its artless orthography it is a positive and particularly curious document.

"PARIS, August 15, 1898.

"SIR,—Madame the Countess de Castiglione has informed me of your intention to prove in your book the falsity of the publications which have

recollection of a crowd of people, Mme. de Castiglione continued to be confounded with the vision of Salammbô.¹

Moreover, always capricious and changeable, she took pleasure in putting to confusion the suppositions and ideas that people formed of her. For instance, in 1862, under circumstances similar to those described above, she undertook to inflict a disappointment on the too inquisitive imperial society. The motive was supplied by some living pictures, that kind of exhibition

appeared in regard to her, and at her request I offer you my help, by means of documents in my possession, to make the public see how little those legends circulated about her are to be believed.

“Living at Passy, where I have my private house, I have known her as a neighbour ever since her arrival in Paris, with her husband and baby. From this time on I have very often had occasion to photograph her, her and her child, sometimes in my garden, sometimes in my studio. For thirty-five years I have been the sole depository of all her negatives, dating from then to the present time. One of the most ridiculous legends is to the effect that the Countess went to a Court ball in 1864, dressed as Salammbô. I affirm that such a dress has never been worn by her. On the very evening of that ball, I saw the Countess at Passy, dressed as the Queen of Etruria, in a costume with a long train, closed and high-necked. In the photographs I made of it the next day, I merely had one arm uncovered, just as my friend the sculptor Carrier-Belleuse did for the statue composed at the same time in my presence at Passy; in order to give both portrait and statue a more artistic stamp. So you see this legend, as well as many others, is absolutely false.

“Entirely disposed to serve you in regard to the assertions of your book, with the reinforcement of documents, I beg you, Sir, &c.

“PIERSON, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour,

“Passy, Rue de la Pompe.”

¹ “Mátho did not hear; he gazed at her. Salammbô’s eyes, Salammbô’s diamonds glittered; the polish of her nails was one with the fineness of the stones burdening her fingers; the two clasps of her tunic, slightly lifting up her breasts, pressed them nearer together, and his thoughts strayed into the narrow interval, where hung a thread holding a plaque of emeralds that lower down was visible through the violet gauze. In her ears she wore two small scales of sapphire, supporting a hollow pearl which was filled with liquid perfume. From time to time the holes in the pearl let fall a tiny drop that wet her bare shoulder. Mátho watched it falling.

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT, *Salammbô*.”

being then much in fashion. For the benefit of some charity, Countess Stéphanie de Tascher had planned a brilliant evening-party, to which the Countess de Castiglione was one of the first to be invited. The news was soon spread abroad, and the journals placed the forthcoming entertainment in high relief. The story was circulated from one drawing-room to another that Mme. de Castiglione meant to appear in the lightest of costumes, and to reveal to the spectators, for the sake of the poor, that perfection of form which their eyes had so far only had the chance of divining from the suggestive outlines of a ball-dress. She determined to punish such impertinence by completely deluding those who had paid a high price, in advance, for the pleasure of an exhibition which was to be refused them. When the stage-setting was being arranged she demanded for her scene an artificial grotto with the inscription: "The Hermitage at Passy." Under its rocky vault what charming deity would be discovered? No doubt she would have imagined the most seductive of disguises, and great was the impatience of the audience. When at last she showed herself they rubbed their eyes with astonishment; they could hardly believe that it was she. There she was, however, concealed by the graceless folds of a baize dress, her head covered with a hood as austere as the religious habit of the order, which was only too entirely in keeping with this hermit's retreat. Then she disappeared for the rest of the evening. Murmurs were general, and vexation was all the keener, as not only had their eyes been cheated, but also their purses.

How much more generously, on another occasion, she had treated certain artists! Sincerely convinced that beauty is a very rare and very evanescent privilege

of nature; that its duty is to educate the eye; that the primary element of inspiration is the harmony of those parts of which beauty is composed, she had condescended to show herself, a living statue, without any veil between her beauty and the artists' admiration. Did she consent once, twice? There is no exact record, but there are people to confirm the fact, at least. They had had a brief vision of this beautiful marble, unclothed. At any rate, one of them, the Baron de Malaret, one day forgot himself in his indiscreet enthusiasm, summing up Mme. de Castiglione's perfections: her dazzling blue eyes, the graces of her face, the flawless shape of her arms, of her waist. "And what wee feet!" he went on, becoming more and more enthusiastic as he proceeded in the evocation of his souvenirs. "What exquisite legs! What . . ." "How? What?" . . . objected the Baroness Malaret—one of the Empress's ladies-in-waiting—who was astonished and annoyed to find her husband so accurately informed as to the Countess's perfections. Though a little out of countenance, the Baron recovered himself and explained that the matter was not quite as she might have supposed, but that he was referring to a certain *séance* of living pictures which had taken place in the presence of a very few persons, and in which Mme. de Castiglione had consented to play a leading part; that he himself had been one of the privileged spectators, and had retained this impression of the scene.

For living pictures, indeed, Mme. de Castiglione sometimes showed an interest, though she seldom took part in *tableaux vivants* without displaying the capriciousness of her temperament. This form of diversion gave her an opportunity of seeing for herself how her attrac-

tions could be made to vary by the play of attitude and combinations of attire. In the art of transformation she felt singularly sure of herself! A piece of stuff carelessly draped, the clever placing of a trinket, the winding about her bust of a light scarf—this was all that was needed. With these devices she could be ready for a portrait—or make herself resemble an odalisque in a dream, in languid poses expressive of the abandonment of her whole being. Or even, evoking the Madonnas of the Roman school, she could give herself the semblance of a saintly figure, little as such an impersonation seemed to be in harmony with her real nature and her desires.

These, however, were but passing fancies. Moreover, the *tableaux vivants* had the ephemeral life of all fashions. She was one of the first to tire of them. She lost her taste for society. The company of the men and women who had been represented to her as the flower of the Parisian world became to her a monotonous spectacle. On close acquaintance with them, she had too often been disappointed in the intelligence of those whom she was obliged to treat as her equals. Little by little she became embittered, and she began to betray her disillusionment by unmistakable signs that tended to arouse a kind of jealous distrust and to alienate her friends. She became melancholy, and the prey of regret. She persuaded herself that she had come to France too late—that in the ascendancy of her physical charms, she, the Italian, could as easily have captured the crown of an empress as the Spaniard; while that, politically, she would have used it with better effect. She recalled her former dream of becoming a power—a dream, alas! that had had but a fleeting moment of realisation: never should she console herself for having

missed the hour, for having failed to "seize the event." A boundless disillusionment crept over her before her youth had begun to wane, and it was in this melancholy mood that the thunderbolt of 1870 descended upon her.

CHAPTER V

FRESH ILLUSIONS IN THE FIELD OF POLITICS

What Mme. de Castiglione was doing in Florence during the Franco-German War—An absolutely unknown point in history—Under what conditions Cavour's beautiful ambassadress, in her thirtieth year, became the diplomatic correspondent of Thiers—Her services to France—The consideration she enjoyed at the Court of Italy—Her return to Paris—A revival of political ambition—What she expected of her Princes, for themselves—Amid the attempts to restore the monarchy—Unknown details—How the Duke d'Aumale, for four-and-twenty hours, beheld himself President of the Republic—The disappointment of the day after—Exchanging letters, hers to him—During the crisis of the 16th of May—Incidents and catchwords of the period—Morny—The Republicans at Mass—Final overthrow of the Orleanist hopes.

THE tempest had extinguished the most brilliant social meteor of the imperial world, and Paris lost sight of its luminous track. There was no longer a Mme. de Castiglione: suddenly, like an extinct star, she had disappeared. Her eyes, however, still shone with their unusual clearness, and the expression of her entrancing features had lost none of its vivacity. For let it not be forgotten, at the fall of the Empire the Countess de Castiglione had but just attained her thirtieth year!

A violent shock had just agitated the inert atmosphere, wherein men's minds had been languishing. She was face to face with a new world, and she hoped to live again for other and still better destinies.

During her sojourn in England, she had entered into very close relations with the princes of the House of Orleans. Of this fact I have already given proofs, and I shall presently produce more complete ones. Moreover, in general, though she had lived in the

master's favour, during the hey-day of Cæsar, yet, with her usual independence of character, she had also known and associated with the members of the opposition. Thiers was a visitor at her little *hôtel* at Passy, and she was very welcome in his house in the Place Saint-Georges. Her relations with this important personage had been only interrupted by the outbreak of the war. They were unexpectedly strengthened at the hour of the nation's distress. She proposed to him to use the personal influence that she enjoyed with Augusta, Queen of Prussia, and with Victor-Emmanuel, King of Italy, for the benefit of France.

She had retired to Florence. It made her happy once again to experience the diplomatic ardour of her youth, to have an appreciable share in the great and terrible events that were developing in Europe; and she managed to render real and important services which were not known to history. The fact deserves to be brought out into the light and to be put to the credit of the Countess de Castiglione. The details were noted with great precision by one of those who directly participated in her action. I transcribe them here exactly as I have found them chronicled in a long letter from Cléry that has passed through my hands.

When, in 1870, Jules Favre was Minister of Foreign Affairs under the government of the National Defence, he sent Cléry, a man of intelligence and eloquence, as a delegate to Florence. Cléry was to accompany Sénart, who had been given a special mission to Victor-Emmanuel II., King of Piedmont and Sardinia. The King was, at that moment, occupied in enlarging his Italian sovereignty, while King William of Prussia was well on the road to becoming an Emperor. Thiers, who was on his way home from his painful pilgrimage

across Europe, had stopped in Florence. One morning Sénart and Cléry had joined him, and they were discussing the misfortunes of France, when the door opened and the servant announced: "Madame the Countess de Castiglione." The visitor had come straight from Genoa, having spent the night in the train, though she looked as if she had enjoyed a long night's rest in her bed. Thiers rose and went toward her, and having kissed her with the affection of an old friend, he took her by the hand and led her to Sénart, saying at the same time to the astonished Minister: "Did you ever see anything more beautiful?" The conversation, however, instantly turned to subjects that were anything but frivolous.

But the statesman was on the point of leaving Florence for Tours, and the week after, Sénart would also be obliged to return to France, recalled, not for political reasons, but in consequence of a cruel blow: the death of his seventeen-year-old daughter. Cléry remained in Florence alone, invested with the full powers of the French Legation at the Court of Victor-Emmanuel. In handing over to him his letters and his own responsibilities, Sénart had said to him: "I have to go, but I must first inform you of a communication made to me by M. Thiers, and which it is my duty to transmit to you. It is this: 'Under all circumstances put yourself at Mme. de Castiglione's disposal. She is the truest, the most devoted, the most intelligent friend we could have, and the one most able to serve us—here.' However, don't ask me for more particulars; I haven't any to give, and M. Thiers has not had time to give me any. You are at present in a very delicate situation, with a very difficult post to fill. In these circumstances I have no further counsels to give you. The important

thing is a quick judgment and an alert and open mind. Act according to events and do your best."

The advantage of such diplomatic instructions as these lies in their brevity. For all that, they were none the less disquieting, none the less perplexing. The next day Cléry received a note from the Countess, written in pencil, in her illegible hand, in which he succeeded in making out that she asked him to call on her. He did so, driving to a palace in the Corso Vittorio-Emanuele, and was admitted. Always fond of a theatrical effect, Mme. de Castiglione was lying on one of those immense couches, of carved and gilded wood, such as were the fashion in Italy in the eighteenth century. She was waiting for him, wrapped in the folds of a flowing and sumptuous gown; but on his entering, she scarcely deigned to turn her head toward the young plenipotentiary—for he was young then, and looked even younger. She merely gave him a hasty greeting in a condescending and protecting way, not unlike that, for example, of a rich client toward a notary's clerk who should be sent to represent his employer. Cléry, who had expected a less discouraging reception, found his first impression by no means agreeable. He had hoped for more consideration for his office on the part of a woman interested in politics, and on the part of a pretty woman more interest in his moustache. Without heeding his discomfiture, she put to him certain questions which sounded to him rather ridiculous, but which she had designed on purpose to feel her way; and just as he was preparing to end what he deemed an idle conversation, she abruptly informed him that she was in possession of a cipher which Thiers had confided to her when he left Florence. Thiers was the spokesman of France in her relations with Europe, and

by means of this cipher she would now be able to correspond with him; then, without more ado, she handed Cléry a despatch to be transmitted by the Embassy, under cover of the diplomatic seal. A second interview was agreed upon for the next day.

Cléry returned at the hour fixed. The Countess explained to him on this occasion that her relations with the Prussian Court would permit her to be of eminent service; that she was in correspondence with Queen Augusta, the future Empress of Germany, both directly and through M. Brassier de Saint-Simon, the Prussian Ambassador in Florence; and finally that, by her intervention, Thiers was awaiting the safe-conduct which would permit him to begin preliminary negotiations relative to a possible armistice.

The French delegate's surprise increased, and was further complicated by a commencement of uneasiness. He passed a sleepless night, unable to make up his mind as to the real character of this strange Countess, of whom he knew nothing except the story of her rôle as a famous beauty during the Empire, and whose loyalty had been vouched for to him solely by Sénart's vague words—and Sénart, in his turn, as he had said, had been merely repeating the recommendations of Thiers! How did it happen that he had received no written instructions in regard to her? Had he perhaps been directed to place unbounded confidence in the actions of a spy,¹ a woman who had possibly imposed upon the discernment of the subtlest of men! The more he reflected, the more his doubts increased. In diplomacy he was but a novice. Supposing she was trying to avail herself of his lack of experience in order to ferret out the secrets of his mission—secrets

¹ In those days one imagined spies at every turn.

which were the very secrets of France! Yet if, on the contrary, he should retire within himself and dispense altogether with her "services," reject the information which she averred she was receiving from a high authority, would he not be depriving Thiers and the government of the National Defence of the co-operation on which they had a right to count? On all sides his anxious mind conjured up formidable ambushes. While secretly blaming himself, he had allowed himself to be taken to nocturnal meetings where the third person was Brassier de Saint-Simon. The Ambassador was an excellent fellow, but the constant fear of his master, Bismarck, pursued him like a nightmare. All this, together with the dread of passing for a traitor, should these secret and questionable interviews be discovered—all this was not calculated to restore peace to Cléry's mind. Finally, however, he was reassured; for the Countess gave him indubitable proofs of her being a safe, prudent, intelligent, and devoted ally. She put at the service of France long-established and important relations, and made it her daily care to employ them in that cause. She was seconded in this by Queen Augusta, the granddaughter of Charles of Saxe-Weimar. By education this Princess cherished little sympathy for Prussia, though her marriage had made her its sovereign; in her feelings and her tastes she was also the very opposite of her husband, and she was, moreover, a friend of French art and letters. Considering how the jealous mind of King William had reduced her to play, in Berlin, so feeble a rôle, she encouraged Mme. de Castiglione, and furthered her aims, as far as it was in her power to do so.

As to Victor-Emmanuel, whose personal inclinations were not doubtful, he went further than merely to

respond sympathetically to the incitements of a semi-official ambassadress. Although aware that inquisitive eyes were incessantly watching and spying upon him, he submitted reluctantly to a policy of maintaining strict neutrality, eager as he was to see Italy fulfilling her mission of a conciliatory, generous, useful friend to the neighbour so sorely tried.

Thus, during this trying and difficult period in the history of Europe, the Countess de Verasis-Castiglione, without taking any false steps and without intrigues, managed to interfere skilfully on behalf of her French friends.

As a matter of fact, she had kept her excellent footing at the Court of Savoy. (Toward the end of her life the future destiny of Italy inspired her with sombre misgivings.) Victor-Emmanuel never ceased to offer her proofs of tender affection, and the royal princes and princesses lavished the most gracious attentions on her. She was held in special esteem by Prince Amédée, whom she aided to obtain the throne of Spain, and when he was leaving to take possession of his fragile crown, he made a point of coming to her house in the Corso to make his adieux. His carriage waited at her door, and Acton and Visconti, Victor-Emmanuel's two ministers, were present during the visit and heard his affectionate words. Knowing what would give her the keenest pleasure, he chose as a parting remembrance a magnificent black pearl mounted in a ring. Her influence at that time extended also to the King's ministers, notwithstanding the fact that long afterwards, in her letters, she expressed a certain grievance against Count Visconti-Venosta. This nobleman was a most perfect gentleman, with a high position, and to his very real personal sympathy for Mme. de Castiglione he joined the deepest sentiments of sympathy for France.

Mme. de Castiglione prolonged her sojourn in Italy, without being much talked about elsewhere. From time to time she reappeared at Court, now and then returning to the Oldoini Palace at Spezia; organising and disorganising the administration of her property; involving herself in a thousand money-matters which she fancied she was managing; and all the time, by an agitated correspondence, reviving what had once been close and cherished relations in her own country, in Spain and in France. Yet she failed to drive out of her heart the memories and regrets that followed her everywhere hauntingly. Whither can one turn one's steps, she said to herself, when life fails us, when we are afraid of solitude, and no longer care for the world?

She returned to Paris, establishing herself in an hotel in the Rue Volney, the hotel de l'Alma. After that she had her jewels brought back from the depths of Calabria, where they had been taken and buried under very romantic circumstances.¹ These things being done, she asked herself on what basis and toward what goal she should build up the new life she was now to lead. She looked about her. What had become of the varied

¹ The casket had been carried to a distant province of Italy, to the end of Calabria, of dramatic memory. No legal paper or official stamp had been employed. No financial or bureaucratic formality had taken place in the negotiations with the plain and upright man who was charged to guard the treasure. By the arrangement a card had been cut in two, one half being left with him, the other half having to fit it, on its presentation to him by a stranger. And the plan was carried out to the letter. Mme. de Castiglione entrusted the mission to a man on whom she could rely, a lawyer, who undertook the journey. When he found himself at the end of his eventful expedition, he had some difficulty in discovering the dwelling of the man he was seeking. It was a strange-looking hovel, inhabited by people still stranger. How attentively they listened to him! With what eyes they scrutinised his face! He produced the complementary pasteboard. When the two pieces were put together, they fitted each other accurately. It was decided to deliver to him the priceless diamonds and pearls that had been hidden in the wall.

and brilliant company that had formerly been her daily spectacle? Terribly isolated she felt herself. To the new-comers she was nothing but a stranger, and she even imagined that she was looked at with a kind of hostile mistrust. She beheld herself the object of humiliating suspicions. These were the first symptoms of that restless, morbid inclination that so beset and darkened the autumn of her life.

So persistent were these impressions that she wrote to the President, asking his aid and protection against her, no doubt imaginary, enemies. Thiers was anxious to dispel her anguish. He had always kept a tender feeling for her, nor had he forgotten how opportunely and intelligently she had intervened during the *année terrible*. So he issued instructions, and informed the Prefect of Police. They would watch over the tranquillity of her days with the utmost care, and nowhere could she be better guarded than in Paris. The President's letter calmed her and filled her with joy, and her plans for going away were postponed.¹ And by way of employing her days she again took up politics; this time for the profit and loss of the House of Orleans.

This idea had been in her mind even before the repression of the Commune. At that really agonising

¹ Here is the original text, which I rediscovered in the archives of the Château de Baromesnil:—

“VERSAILLES, Dec. 21, 1872.

“MY DEAR COUNTESS,—I have had a talk with the Prefect of Police with regard to your fears; he had already taken an interest in you. He does not believe that any danger threatens you, but he will be none the less awake to everything that concerns you. Rely upon my help and my old friendship, and rest assured that in France you will be as well protected as in your own country; for I recall what you did in Florence for the sake of our poor France when it was so unhappy. Begging you to believe in my lasting sentiments,—THIERS.”

moment—when the citizen army, chafing under its forced inactivity, yet dreading to be disbanded, claimed a fixed wage from the Insurrection—the Countess was aware that certain discerning men had made advances to the Duke d’Aumale, entreating him to intervene, and to make himself master of the situation. The Duke had been advised to appear before the National Assembly, to demand the immediate ratification of his election, and to put his loyal sword at the service of public order and the law. He had behind him his prestige as a soldier and administrator in Algiers. The consequences of such an initiative could not have remained doubtful. Once at the head of the army, he might then naturally become—to the great joy of the Orleanist party—the head of the Government. So sure were they of the possibility of realising this plan that they had even prepared the speech which he would be called upon to deliver in these dramatic circumstances. The Duke d’Aumale, however, under the domination of chivalrous scruples, which could in nowise further the interests of his House, declined to act. Some there were who put it differently, saying, “He has backed out.” The Countess heard at one and the same time of the fact of these overtures, and of their failure.

“No—a hundred times no!” the Duke, in whom the patriot outranked the prince, had answered. “Since I was refused the joy of leading the French troops against the Prussians, I will not begin again my career by turning them against the Parisians.”

His friends argued with him. France, they said, had need of him; the army longed for a chief whom it could trust; it was the duty of a prince to march at the head of his party at moments of peril as well as of pleasure. But all arguments were vain. The Duke

stood obstinately firm, and to those who extolled energetic action he replied: "Oh, I am not one of those princes who are always ready to draw their swords on the boulevards of Paris and dip them in French blood, in order to cast them next at the King of Prussia's feet. If it is princes of this sort you want, go seek them elsewhere!" This language had a magnanimous ring; but, after all, France was in need of a man to stamp out the revolution and to save her from herself.

The red orgy had been drowned in its own blood. Everything in France had to be reconstructed, reorganised. What was to be the constitutional legality of the future? Twice mangled, all but done to death by a foreign and by a civil war, this unhappy nation was waiting to be regenerated. After the stationary phase succeeding the period of general havoc, what Government could be found to assume the heavy task of restoring to France her place among the nations?

The field was open to rival ambitions. While the republicans were beginning to lay foundations for a solid structure, the hopes of the monarchists that had lain dormant for eighteen years began to revive and assume a fresh vigour. Rival persons and programmes, labelled in all colours, sprung innumerable into being. The imperialists, although so lately overthrown, were already raising their heads and burning to re-enter the lists, fancying that an excellent place as dictator was vacant in France, and that the part must be played not by the most prudent—as M. Thiers gave it to be understood—but by the boldest and the most popular.

The Count de Chambord was wrapping himself in

the folds of his white flag with its fleur-de-lis, expecting Providence to step forward into the open in favour of his cause.¹ At his back were the princes who had not yet recovered from their astonishment at once more treading openly their country's soil, and were cautiously studying the nature of the ground. Some of their friends even reproached them with too great caution; and among these critics was the beautiful Countess de Castiglione, who had forgotten not the Bonapartes, but the Empire.

She had recently returned from Italy, under the protection of her old friend Thiers, and all her thoughts and aspirations were centred on the future glory of the Duke d'Aumale; and in her impassioned way she quickened in him the hope of a prompt restoration of the monarchy and the tricolour. She wrote to him: "France must be won over, and no one can do it better than you."

When he had surrendered to Marshal MacMahon the performance of that painful but necessary task of conquering his fellow-citizens, the militant members of his party were profoundly chagrined, and among them our heroine and her Norman backer. This unmincing acolyte had declared to the Duke, at the time: "My Lord, had your ancestors had the same sentiments (sentiments, that is, as noble as they are futile), we should still be measuring off cloth in the Rue Saint-Denis." And Napoleon III.'s ex-favourite, who was pining in vain for the re-establishment of a Court, added to a long and plaintive letter, filled with tirades, the following remark: "Why is it that a prince who bravely affronts life's problems in the open, and who is fearless

¹ It is well known how he was excluded after his letter of the 27th of October 1874.

on the battlefield, should be so lacking in determination when alone in his study?"

She wished a thousand deaths to those who were letting loose in the world the revolutionary mania (*la rage jacobine*), and she pitied the fate of those modern wearers of crowns who never can be sure of their subjects' docility; and as she was convinced that, in the long run, it was preferable to command than to obey, she made every effort to impress upon the minds of the Pretenders a lively idea of this principle. She had no relations whatever with the Château d'Eu, in the person of the Count de Paris, but she wrote assiduously and with great zeal to her friend, the Duke de Chartres; and she importuned the Duke d'Aumale, who was rich, generous, and childless, to prepare the way for the rest of the family.

"Why delay being yourself and imposing conditions?" asked the impatient Florentine.

"Well—and afterwards?" retorted the Prince. "You know that politics have never been one of my passions. The only desire I have ever had—and tenaciously hold—is to help re-establish the boundaries of France, to restore to her her children, to re-constitute that great, essential, fundamental portion of the work of our fathers, in which such cruel breaches have been made by adventurers and by false patriots. Very well, I cannot see that we are on the right path, as yet; but I admit that things often happen when one expects them least, and that it is right to be ready for them."

It was his principle to avoid precipitating events with noisy violence, and to be carried along by the current; and, whatever the opinion held of him by others, he refused either to hasten the current or to outrun it.

Meanwhile, Thiers was anchoring himself to the presidency, and he seemed by no means disposed to bequeath his inheritance to the sons of his former master. The members of the National Assembly, three-quarters royalist, had certainly and egregiously allowed themselves to be caught in a trap when they allowed that canny old gentleman to exercise the presidential functions, simply as an experiment. Great indeed had been their credulity in imagining that his one desire would be to divest himself of the office, at the right hour, in favour of some aspirant to the crown, or even of some princely candidate representing an Athenian republic. The provisional tag which they had benevolently granted to the transition government was bound slowly to become the symbol, while they gazed, of a solid reality.

It is too often forgotten that Thiers had always dreamt of sovereign power. The monarchists who were surrendering to him their highest hopes, ought certainly to have been aware that he would never strive for the re-establishment of a throne where he himself was not to have a place. Long before the Revolution of 1848, he had already revealed the extent of his ambition. One evening in 1840, he and a friend were passing the Tuileries, where Louis-Philippe and his family were peacefully sleeping, and in the starlight he looked up at the palace with fixed attention. "Well, well," he said to his companion, "perhaps, some day, I shall sleep there." Thirty years later an ardent supporter of the royalist cause brought before the Chamber the princes' claim to the honour and peril of fighting in the French ranks, and at the close of the sitting Thiers joined him in the lobbies. He broke out in virulent abuse, exclaiming, "All that is madness. Why don't you mind your own business?"

The unflinching rival of Guizot, the constitutional liberal, he might have been an Orleanist, and Orleanist he was, completely, during Louis-Philippe's reign; but nothing of Orleanism remained, either in his opinions or in the general situation. In 1869, at the Corps Législatif, he made this clear to those who thought they had been misinformed. "I do not know how long present institutions will last, but the only kind of government that can succeed it is a Republic." And observing an expression of surprise on their faces, he repeated with emphasis, "I said 'a Republic'!"

Once the Empire had ceased to be, the imperative necessity of proclaiming the Republic became all the more obvious to the man who had announced it. The Government and Chambers were to remove from Bordeaux to Versailles, and it was several hours before their departure. In the saloon carriage were seated the Executive with Jules Favre and Ernest Picard, when Albert, Duke de Broglie, the deputy for the department of the Eure, and Thiers's future antagonist, entered to receive his instructions for the London Conference, whither Thiers had decided to send him. During the journey "the Liberator," discoursing on the events of the day, violently attacked the Orleans princes, and when the Duke attempted to defend them, Thiers persisted in exclaiming: "Their conduct is outrageous; they are seeking a crown amidst the misfortunes of our country!"

Nevertheless, the princes displayed great prudence. Although called to serve their country as deputies, the Prince de Joinville and the Duke d'Aumale had resigned themselves, on the 6th of September, to leaving Paris, then to stopping on the way to Bordeaux, and finally to remaining very quietly at Biarritz until the Chamber

had regularised their election. It was at this time that Estancelin had the following piquant conversation with the illustrious statesman :¹—

“ I am going to Biarritz. Have you any commission for the Duke d’Aumale and the Prince de Joinville ? ”

“ What the devil do they want here ? ” replied Thiers. “ We could have quite well got on without them.”

“ That is exactly my opinion. Their place was not in this Assembly. But, in short, here they are. What, after all, can they do ? Where do you want them to go ? ”

“ As far away as possible.”

“ To Chantilly ? ”

“ Where they like, but as far as possible.”

And still the princes waited for signs of his goodwill. Two years went by thus. In the interval the Orleans family, aided somewhat treacherously by Thiers, had recovered its forty millions. But soon after occurred the *coup d’état* of May 24, 1873, and then what a change of perspective—what hopes springing up in their footsteps !

The man responsible for the republic in France had just fallen a victim to a coalition of the Right. During four-and-twenty hours, far from the politicians, her desires and aims unsuspected, there was a certain beautiful Italian who might well cherish the illusion that her magnificent dream of glory and friendship was to be realised. The members of the Centre and of the Right had taken the initiative of appealing to the Duke d’Aumale, well knowing that never would he venture to take the initiative himself. They had offered him the Presidency of the Republic, and in spite of their varying programmes the different majorities considered

¹ I have found the original account in a letter to the Countess.

themselves sufficiently united to be able to compose their differences and to rally temporarily about his name. He declared himself ready, and said he would acquiesce in the will of the elect of the nation. The future seemed theirs. He went to bed President of the Republic, but he did not wake up as President. During the night the Bonapartists, who were to form part of the ministry, had reconsidered matters. They had begun to reflect on a certain utterance of the Duke d'Aumale's, made on the previous day: "*I am willing to be a transaction—a transition, never.*" They knew him capable of keeping his word, and so the imperialists took back theirs; they could not make up their minds to deliver over to a prince of the House of Orleans a presidency of which they were unable to forecast the duration and the consequences. The monarchists were obliged to yield. France, rejecting both a radical and a princely Republic, had chosen the military Republic of the Duke de Magenta. Prince Henry of Orleans no doubt regretted that he should be unable to make use of the secret passage which, as a measure of precaution or convenience, he had had constructed between his *hôtel* in the Faubourg St. Honoré and the Palace of the Elysée.

During this period of uncertainty, when the last chance of the monarchists was being staked, Mme. de Castiglione suffered the utmost agitation of mind: feverish hopes, combinations overthrown as soon as formed, to be again resumed in desperation; such was the warp and woof of her days and nights. Her impatience to know all that was being done, said, or written was unremittingly, but harrowingly satisfied. It gave

her a fresh lease of life to participate, even by the imagination, in the activity of the Prince. Her great rôle was to wrest him from his state of torpor, to stimulate his supineness, to goad him on to action. "Make your friends, the princes, *will* what they *cannot* will," she wrote. "But I fear we shall never attain it, neither you nor I. They will not listen to exhortation and advice: attachment is dangerous and devotion useless."

It was indeed no easy task to push them out of the perfectly straight and narrow path! The Duke d'Aumale, with his upright and loyal liberalism and his unflinching honesty, stood at order, his bearing that of proud expectancy and firm abstention—slow-paced attitudes and principles that do not carry one far on ambition's road! But he had laid aside ambition.¹ The Duke de Nemours, the only real politician in the family, experienced the scruples and hesitations of timidity. The Duke de Chartres would have had the energy lacking to Nemours had he not, on every occasion, subordinated his action and initiatives to the dictates of his elders. Finally, the Count de Paris, a loyal and noble character, but exceptionally lacking in judgment and good sense, spent all his time in reflection and discouraged the enthusiasm of his followers.

Among those who were in favour of immediate action was Estancelin, who in a letter to the Countess de Castiglione recounted a rather lively dialogue he had

¹ Some years later, after this experience and these events, the Duke d'Aumale noted down these reflections, which contain a shade of sadness: "Yes, I believe without false modesty that I could have been of greater service. I have always been ready, I have never imposed myself upon others, have never taken anybody's place. I have always felt a greater desire for military glory than for political ambition; but I should not have drawn back, and as far as my strength will permit, I shall never draw back from fulfilling my duty" (unpublished letter, January 1, 1889).

had, not long before, with his "King"—a conversation showing clearly enough what might be expected of him, and how incapable he was of illegal or unconstitutional action. The Count de Paris and M. de Limbourg, Prefect of the Seine-Inférieure, were dining at the Château de Baromesnil, and the conversation, turning on the irritating politics of the day, promptly became heated. Estancelin, undisciplined follower that he was,¹ called out, just as the heady wines were being served at dessert: "My Lord, you are surrounded by simpletons (even if they do belong to the Academy Française), who will ruin you." He knew it. Everybody was waiting for a sudden move. If only he would urge his friends who were then holding the keys of government, to employ with all their might all the resources that the law had put into the hands of the existing authority!

"My Lord," Estancelin assured him, "if your followers display any energy, success is certain. I do not know them, but I would undertake to secure victory, if I may use the necessary means."

"Oh yes: a *coup d'état*, with the help of the Bonapartists: no doubt you would succeed! But these are Bonapartist methods, to which I am absolutely opposed. If necessary, I'll take my musket to defend the Constitution and my country's liberties."

The phrase was impeccable; but when one wanted to be known as Philip VII., nothing could have been worse reasoned. At all events, the game twice lost, was given a last chance on the 16th of May 1876. This was when Marshal MacMahon, conscientiously convinced

¹ One day the Count de Paris exclaimed to him: "I don't like people without discipline!"—"My Lord," he had replied boldly, "there are people who are *born* to command, but *constituted* to obey, and there are others who are born to obey, but constituted to command. As for me, I have never in my life obeyed" (Letter xcix.).

that the National Assembly had chosen him to thwart the advent of advanced ideas, broke with the majority of the Left by an act of authority.

The idea of a *coup d'état*, I said, was in everybody's mind, and so general, in fact, was the belief in it, that at the Stock Exchange, for a moment, the brokers received rather large orders from the republicans to buy State bonds, the idea being that there was sure to be a rise on the restoration of the monarchy.

In the royalist camp great hopes had been placed in M. de Fourtou, Minister of the Interior. To those who had come in contact with him he had appeared to be another Morny, and like Morny, capable of launching another Second of December. Twenty years had passed, but it was all still as fresh as yesterday: Morny had managed the affair so deftly and smartly! In an instant all the forces of the republican party were entangled and paralysed; a hundred arrests had been made with such despatch that not one of them took more than twenty minutes.¹ What a model of drastic and expeditious action! To be sure some of the houses in the Boulevard had been spattered with blood: some strollers, some women and children had paid with their lives for the accident of being there at the wrong time. But success signs the amnesty for the mistakes of chance.

There was no lack, moreover, in the liberal party of elastic consciences, with an aptitude for transformation, provided that in the division of spoils on the following day they were given the assurance that they had not been forgotten. The counter-revolution would break out suddenly, and start, they said, in the Ministry of the Interior. The knowing ones thought they could keep out of the way. Signs of these accommodating

¹ Thiers's arrest alone had taken a little time.

dispositions were beginning to appear, and if only they were a little encouraged, they would promptly thrive.

No more tell-tale symptom of this revolution than that related by the Count de Falloux to Estancelin, who, in turn, hastened to repeat it to his faithful correspondent, the Countess de Castiglione. Rich as history is in such examples, one could scarcely find a prettier instance under the general law of the psychology of revolutions than the following fact.

M. de Falloux was a Catholic, living up to his profession of faith, and regularly attending the Sunday services of his parish. A real republican, publicly known as such, would never have ventured, before the dissolution of the Chamber, to put his foot inside a church. Now behold what happened under de Falloux' own eyes, by the grace of Providence, on the Sunday following Marshal MacMahon's act. The converts were legion : at Mass they were all seen, devoutly bowing their heads ; and at the end of the service these liberals stood in rows waiting for the former constitutional minister to pass by—polite, eager, soliciting his glance and greeting. They had crowded, we repeat, the morning service ; and they had been so touched by Grace that they returned in the afternoon for vespers. But a week later not one of them was there. The Ministry of the 16th of May had been judged and found wanting. It was not going to win the game. No one any longer was afraid. . . .

They dared not, because it would have been too perilous, or too unworthy to dare. . . . And history took up its march without heeding the sighs of Mme. de Castiglione, deploring the Prince's weakness.

CHAPTER VI

BREAKING WITH SOCIETY

Profound discouragement—Mme. de Castiglione's second life—Opposite "the Column"—Three bastions to clear before reaching the centre of the place—Description of a Parisian *entresol*, such as one seldom sees—As at the Play—Looking out on the street at passing events—Revival of public interest in the name and person of the Countess de Castiglione—Concerning a change of lodgings—From the Place Vendôme to the Rue Cambon—Bitter regrets—Her melancholy reflections, as recorded in her letters—The fantastic character of her correspondence.

THE crumbling of Orleanism was the last and the most complete of her intellectual disappointments. There was no longer any doubt of it, the future of the political party, on which she had staked her supreme hopes, was utterly compromised. Whither now could she turn in order to find a field for her activity and to satisfy her longing to be occupied in a political cause or on behalf of a pretender? Her name was no longer familiar to the statesmen and politicians of Europe, and it would be a vain task now to try to create fresh relations permitting her to exert an influence on events. The old friends had failed her, and her soul no longer vibrated to the lilt of her whilom aspirations.

Furthermore, her frequently painful, and somewhat limited, contacts with life had opened her eyes to the hollowness of social relations. Little by little, she had developed an incurable hatred of mankind. Finally, the years were beginning to count. While beauty may be independent of social revolutions, it can not defy the flight of time. Her dream had not been realised

to keep unaltered her wealth of hair, the perfect oval of her face, and her exceptionally fine teeth (not long before and under dramatic circumstances one of her teeth had been broken). Cruelly and prematurely she began to perceive the change. Her friends remained faithful; her admirers became fewer and "far between." Could it be that the hour of retirement had already struck? Was she to be nothing but an anonymous and unknown member of the crowd in the capital which only yesterday had witnessed her triumphs? Her eyes and thoughts had more than once reverted with anxious questionings to Sicily. Ten or twelve years back, before she had encountered her perilous thirtieth year, after the death of the husband from whom she was separated, she might have contracted a marriage with a member of the illustrious family of Doria, and have settled in Genoa in great magnificence. At that time the noble and elegant lines of her figure, which formed the chief and incomparable attribute of her physical beauty, had attained their prime perfection. But she had not yielded to this seductive prospect, and since then she had several times wished to leave France for good. She had now and then tried to detach herself from Paris, either by an occasional flight to England, or by a sudden rush to Italy; but, these flights accomplished, she had been only the more impatient to return, abandoning without too great regret the airy terraces of her beautiful mountains, the sparkling lakes, and the villas set in gardens.

What were her special reasons for thus preferring residence in Paris, with its constraint and social obligations, to the large ease and complete liberty which she might have enjoyed, in her own real atmosphere, at Spezia, in her palace Oldoini? There were induce-

ments enough, however, to return thither.¹ Would it not have been a far pleasanter existence to nurse her last dreams under her own skies, in the shade of the great trees that had seen her childhood's games? Now and then she had a longing to return to the old home, but the desire was only fleeting.

"How I should like," she sighed, "to revisit my beautiful gulf and *my own* buildings."

But alas! when she had revisited *her beautiful gulf*, the temptation to remain there immediately evaporated. Her Parisian habits had so curiously altered her native Italian prejudices as even to inspire a dislike for her native tongue.² If she had not been afraid of losing, thereby, her royal pension and of having to reduce her income to the point of being no longer able to keep a carriage, she would have unhesitatingly solicited French naturalisation. But such a decision would have entailed many difficulties: she would have been obliged to sell her Italian property, which would have implied a succession of expensive journeys, in short, to take a grave step in the dark. So she came to the conclusion that she could never make up her mind to leave "this infernal Paris," to which she was attached by so many strong ties of habit. Her streets in the Vendôme quarter with their familiar life and bustle; her friends; her physicians³; the French language; everything kept her there.

¹ "They are now demanding me at Spezia: the peasants, the people, the shopkeepers, the county-councillors want to utilise the glory of their country-woman—*who made Italy*—by creating her the foundress and benefactress of a host of charities" (Letters, ccxviii.).

² "In truth, I detest this new Tower of Babel which they call Italian, which I no longer know how to write. They irritate me with their *z*, their *g*, their *u*. It gets on my nerves" (Letters, cclvii.).

³ These were house-surgeons who afterwards became well-known physicians, such as Professor Sebileau and Dr. Hugenschmidt; and others, already established in their practice, such as Janicot and others. Their visits were frequent, and their ministrations at her bedside were regular during the last years.

“To eat the bread made of my Cappucini wheat ; to drink the milk of my own cows ; to taste the grapes from my own vines ; to burn my own wood of Isola ; to consume my own vinegar and my own olive-oil ; to inhale the fragrance of my violets, my camelias, my pansies, and my roses ; this would be like exile to me. I should perhaps climb my cherry-trees and decorate, in advance, my tomb—but . . . I should bore myself dreadfully. Here I can still bring together some fifty friends. Down there they would come to see me the first year ; after that, nothing ; it would be death. At the Court alone I have still a place, and there I should be as well received as in the past. Even so I should have to follow it to Rome, and—who knows ?—begin an agitated existence, re-enter the circle of futile rivalries. To that I could not make up my mind, for I know too well what strife, and jealous envy, of that kind means.”

So she had composed her doubts. She would cling fast to the resolution henceforth to make Paris her home. She would jealously shut herself away in voluntary seclusion, with her happy and her melancholy memories, maintaining the cult of her last attachments, but receiving only such visitors as she herself might indicate.

It was at No. 26 Place Vendôme, in a low-studded *entresol*, that her disappointed soul hoped to find a compensation in reasonable affections and absolute calm. She settled down there on the 1st of January 1877, and there she was destined to remain until January 1894. The noble square is central and frequented ; but it has resources of another kind unsuspected by the casual visitor. Perhaps no spot in Paris could have been better chosen for seeing everything that is worth

seeing, without being seen oneself; and from the moment she took possession of her apartment, she so arranged her daily life as to feel herself well protected against importunate curiosity.

In her various lodgings, the Countess had always given rein to her truly Italian imagination, in making the simplest things appear mysterious: she rejoiced in romantic and complicated inventions in order to multiply the difficulties of access to herself. Thus, at No. 10 Rue de Castiglione, in a spare apartment she had once had, I was shown the mechanism of what I can only call a turnstile door, which, swinging on its pivot, hid from sight whoever might be coming in or going out. In the Place Vendôme a private entrance had been arranged for her, on the right side of the building, of a kind to ensure the most artful protection! Before reaching the goal, one had to halt thrice. From the street the visitor had to announce himself by the sign agreed upon (preferably a whistle), which Mme. de Castiglione quickly caught through her closed shutters. The street-door gaped open, but you had scarcely advanced two paces when you stumbled against a second door, forbidding and iron-plated, that guarded the approach to the staircase. After one had pronounced the indispensable "Open Sesame," the door turned on its hinges. After that the visitor had still to mount the few steps leading to the landing of the *entresol*, which had no bell. The interior mechanism of the lock worked noiselessly, and at last one crossed the threshold of this so severely barricaded flat, while the shrill yelps of two little dogs welcomed the visitor as a well-known guest.

A narrow anteroom opened into a low and stuffy little drawing-room, which had a divan at the farther

end and was crammed with a confusion of tables, stands, and whatnots of soiled silk.

In this house mirrors had been proscribed, for its mistress was beginning to fear them. In place of them, a number of precious portraits of herself, vaguely indicated against a sombre background, reflected the more smiling aspect of her past; particularly in the evening, in the twinkling light of the candles, or when the gas, usually kept low like a night-light, had been turned up. In the daytime the heavy curtains were kept pinned together, so that the room was in semi-darkness, but at night the Countess had only to raise her eyes to behold again her fine mouth with its original expression and that line at the corners of the lips, the melancholy drop of the smile; to see her capricious hand sowing flowers like jewels; and to admire the undulating form that she had moulded into so many poses and attitudes. There were show-cases, filled with *bibelots* and relics of the past. She lived over again the hours and the circumstances when she had worn this or that sumptuous brocade, this or that satin or silk gown of bright colours, or these light cambrics so becoming to her graceful walk.

There were certain evenings when she endeavoured positively to resuscitate the former days, when for a short and glittering period she was "the favourite"—or, more justly speaking, the queen of beauty! It was for her intimates, for her pseudo-cousin, Marie Walewska, for her old friend Estancelin, oftenest for herself, that she arranged these scenes. She cherished the touching and impossible dream of somehow annihilating the years, and of evoking afresh her old-time loveliness;¹ but the old touch was wanting, and these

¹ Henri de Regnier.

experiments in the resurrection of her ancient self were doomed pathetically to failure.

Odd and unaccountable in every impulse of the heart or caprice of the brain, she insisted always on suiting her surroundings to her changed or changing mood, whether those moods were moods of joy and pleasure or of grief and pain. Since the loss of her son in the prime of youth, the son whom she believed to have been assassinated, deep sorrow had taken possession of her heart and mind, and she had stamped everything about her with an aspect of sadness.

What a strange impression a visitor received who entered, for the first time, without having been warned, her drawing-room in the Place Vendôme! In spite of the paintings in the panels and the marble busts on the consoles, there was nothing bright or gay about the room; the general impression was gloomy, not to say lugubrious. The dark wood furniture was covered with black velvet, and a black felt carpet covered the floor, relieved only by patches of violet fringe. The white ceiling cast a gleam of light over this blackness; but even that effect was spoiled because the ceiling was encircled by an ebony-coloured moulding. One shuddered on entering. But she, the Countess de Castiglione, found it all to her liking; the place was adapted to the colour of her thoughts. In order to fill the days (for she no longer went out except at night) she carried on an active correspondence, or received at stated times her intimate friends, or she remained alone, thinking, scribbling—unless, from behind her windows, she gazed at the shifting life of the street.

Stubbornly as she kept herself shut up from morning till evening, it does not follow that she lived a mummy-life within four walls, utterly insensible to the breathing and stirring world without. The outside light filtered through the slats of her closed shutters. While at one moment, from behind the panes, her dreaming eyes took in the fleeting sensations of the day; at another, with a reawakened, even an amused, curiosity, she noted attentively, as from an ideal observatory, every sound that reached her from the street, in all the richness of their expression and suggestion. She sat then as at the play, taking part in all the vicissitudes of the shifting scene, participating in the popular festivals that chanced to overflow into her quarter, responding to the multiple shocks provided by the great spectacle of Parisian life.

Thus, at fixed dates, the fête-days of the Republican year, she had presented to her vision a Place Vendôme enveloped in trappings of fire, with flags at the windows, flowers in the balconies, a profusion of electric lights, and the tricolour flag snapping in the wind. At other times there was a change of scene, and, seated behind her curtains, she could count the goings and comings of those princes for whom the Hotel Bristol is a kind of aristocratic road-house. The sight was a constant fillip to an imagination crowded with memories of the European Courts! She recognised some of the passers-by, she supplied names to the faces. Often she perceived her old friend Galliffet, turning his head in her direction with an appeal, as it were, for a greeting in answer to his military salute! And chance brought into the ken of her observation still other faces she had known in the old days under the Empire. A thousand details returned to her memory, vivid fleeting

evocations, but now strangely out of drawing, of the protagonists of the imperial *régime*, who were now scattered to the four winds of heaven! Or, in marked contrast, she had within her range of vision the ebb and flow of those public events, of which the Parisian asphalt was the theatre. For example, in 1889 a strange historical page was unfolded before her eyes when the great Revisionist agitation descended into the open street. I refer to the tumult of the short-lived Boulanger movement, of which her letters at the time are full. She passed then more than one fine sleepless night; her imagination fired by the possibilities of the moment, although to listen to her one would have to believe that she deplored these vigils.¹ Profoundly interested she certainly was in the hopes, so soon quenched, of a military reaction, whose first act, after the victory, would be to strangle the Republic! Moreover, what alarm at the time in the princes' camp! They rallied from all points of the compass: from Spain, with Don Carlos, who, in the name of the Legitimists, launched a ringing manifesto, magnificently signed: *Your King*; from Egypt, with the Duke de Chartres, who lost not a second; with the eldest of the family, who dashed with the others into the open, his pockets bulging with manifestos. And mingling in the fray, in singular and unexpected contrast, were the anarchists, who had opened an account with the Revolution by breaking windows. Topsy-turvydom was general, or, to use the language of the Countess, everybody was trying to "get a finger in the pie." The time was ripe for a change. According to Mme. de Castiglione, France, in her opinion, was literally wallowing in the

¹ "We are, all three of us, ill (she and her two dogs) from the mad excitement in the street" (Letters, cxii.).

slough of despond, with its readerless journals, its song-writers at the end of their rhymes, and its talentless draughtsmen. Now, at last, there would be something new! The city was up and stirring. Finally, there was to be an end of the dull boredom of this democracy, in which nothing ever happened! The streets resounded with the cries of the hawkers retailing their crazy wares, and selling by thousands the popular song, *Les Voleurs*, an insulting epithet reciprocally bandied about among the several political parties. The most varied rumours were afloat, and the wildest stories took root in soil singularly favourable to their development.

The Government resists. Troops are ordered out; Saint Lazare is barricaded and the train-service interrupted. Fire-engines stationed in the Place Vendôme are ready to fly to the Élysée, which is menaced by the mob; ready, too, to cool the ardour of the hot-headed crowd. It is announced that the Congress of Versailles is over, and that the members have returned to Paris. At the news of the result of the presidential elections, the street is rife once more with rumours: there is a rumour of an invasion from the heights of Belleville; people are talking of dragging the detested President of the Senate out of his seat. Party cries clash: "Boulangier for ever!" "Down with Ferry!" A solitary cheer of "Vive Ferry!" arises articulate out of the clamour. It is an honest cry from some one just under Mme. de Castiglione's windows. "Hurrah for Ferry!" The audacious partisan is immediately seized, before her eyes, by brutal hands, violently hustled by the crowd, and at last flung, so much flotsam and jetsam, a mangled wreck, against the wall of her house.

There were other episodes for her to note on the

following day: the tumult in the street; the cavalry charges; the arrest of that red Amazon, Louise Michel. Then suddenly everything quieted down. The Countess had been awakened from her customary torpor; but out of this amazing riot had issued nothing to her liking. There had been no change in the position of those in power. The stream of the populace had returned to its bed, and Mme. de Castiglione could go to hers more peaceably than during the last two nights. But once again all her hopes had been dashed. Macbeth's cauldron had not produced the great revolution which she had hoped to see rising from it; France was to remain republican, and the Countess's little dogs would no longer yelp so distractedly. For the truth of history obliges me to state that the insurrection had been intolerable to them, and that for two days they had not closed their eyes.¹

Amid the tumult that surrounded her, her own acts and person continued, as far as the public was concerned, to be wrapped in complete silence. Her circle, which was steadily shrinking day by day, and through her own fault, was now composed solely of a very few tried and congenial friends. At long intervals the Countess's name was recalled, vaguely and allusively, as a part of some reminiscent chronicle, or by chance in connection with a picture of the great world in the setting of the Tuileries. But the allusions were rarely to her credit, or couched in terms that gave her any satisfaction. No sign from her, however, revealed the

¹ "Sleep impossible. What a night! Up till two o'clock a howling mob, fire-engines, charges of cavalry, arrests. They are very much afraid of the 3rd of December, whether Ferry remains or not. . . . It is getting more and more on my little dogs' nerves" (Letter cxiii.).

impression made upon herself. It was the desire of the members of her family that she should maintain an attitude of indifference, that she should never reply, nor even seem to see. Her son was in the diplomatic service in Spain, and her father, the Marquis of Oldoini, was an Ambassador to the Portuguese Court; both had besought her to avoid keeping alive offensive reports, or stirring up vain discussions about their name.

Now, for some years the Parisian Press had seemed virtually to have lost sight of her. By what indiscreet intermediary did the news suddenly appear in a morning paper that she, who had been mute and all but forgotten, had just given sign of life? The famous Mme. de Castiglione, whom every one supposed to be dead, was still in Paris, and it was even known that she was on the point of changing her dwelling-place; that she was about to transplant her lares and penates from the Place Vendôme to the Rue Cambon. What could be more natural or more simple? Rapidly, however, this trivial fact was amplified until it assumed the proportions of an event. A strange revival of curiosity was manifested in the journals and the clubs, and old anecdotes, most inaccurately reported, were put into circulation. Once more the transparent veils of the virgin of Tanit fluttered before the more excitable imaginations, and the notes of Mlle. Bouvet, the Empress's beautiful reader, were sedulously resuscitated. Mme. de Castiglione has left us her opinion of them: "Mlle. Bouvet was ill-inspired, by the recollection of a slight offence which she had tried to do me, in attempting to dish up certain curious incidents with precious little concern for accuracy."

These reports, however, were virtually the only source of information concerning the Countess. There

seemed to have survived solely the false and tenacious legends, the story of Salammbô's diaphanous garment, her supposed expulsion from the Tuileries, her meetings with the Emperor, the rivalry between the Empress and *the favourite*; the gossip, in a word, of the ante-room, and that gossip alone. Never was there any hint of her firm perseverance in seconding Cavour's designs, of her international relations, of her exceptional knowledge of foreign languages, of her intellectual perspicacity, or of her moral worth. The stock-in-trade of the anecdotes now figuring in the Press seemed to be a medley of tales, smuggled in from no one knew what source, and carelessly dumped down before the public, according to the printer's devil's exigencies. All this was bound to cause her great vexation and pain, which were inevitably enhanced by the cruel insinuations made at the same time as to the effort that she—the enchantress of a former day—was now making to hide her alleged "age and ugliness." A certain society sheet, which was considered the arbiter of royalist elegance, had recently admitted a paragraph, in which, with reference to Mme. de Castiglione's removal, some one specified the details of her physical decay. But who had seen her, who could vouch for the fact? Was she, then, so well, or rather so little known? And even so, was gossiping personality of this kind worthy of France, the classic land of courtesy and good taste? She complained of it bitterly one April evening, in 1892, to a member of the serious Press, whom she had received on purpose that he might repeat her protest publicly. Had she not resolved to bury herself alive in the constant regret of her past happiness and her vanished hopes? And would they not grant her, at least, this supreme consolation?

But she protested in vain. Do what she might, people still concerned themselves about her, and for days and days her table overflowed with letters: unheard-of offers of service; offers from shopkeepers and second-hand dealers to buy—one, her jewels; another, her fans; a third, her parasols. The more exacting *amateurs* begged for keepsakes, of the kind that are said to be "priceless," and that, consequently, one refrains from paying for.

But at length the time came when these importunate people let her alone; the buzz of all this tittle-tattle was quelled; and it was not a moment too soon, for her landlord, frightened by the hubbub, refused to give asylum any longer to a woman who was as difficult a lodger as any magistrate might have been. Quiet once more took up its abode with the beautiful survivor of the old society, and she was once more free to install her belongings tranquilly, unmolested by impertinent criticism.

It was not without deep regret that she yielded to the necessity of leaving the apartment where she had so long lived over again, in memory, the hours of her former triumphs. She had her fixed habits, and in spite of her capricious and fantastic temperament and her original tastes, it was a great wrench to tear herself away from those spots on which she had put her impress—where she knew that, in abandoning them, she was, as it were, leaving a part of her soul.

All but forgotten, hidden away for seventeen years in her dark corner, as she herself had willed it, Mme. de Castiglione had nevertheless lived, in a way, on the balcony of Paris. It was, indeed, a cruel day for her

when she had to forsake her dusty *entresol* in the Place Vendôme and *her* column, as she loved to call it, in order to bury herself alive in the lodgings of the Rue Cambon. But she was constrained to take this step in consequence of a change of owners,¹ and of considerable alterations in the building, such as adding to the height of the storeys.²

After removing to the Rue Cambon it seemed to her as if now only vague echoes reached her from the outside world, which, though she took no part in it, interested her greatly. In melancholy accents she gave voice to this impression. One *Mardi Gras* alone, in these new quarters bereft of memories, while from afar the muffled sounds reached her of this half-holiday, in which the people of Paris make such desperate efforts to appear to be amused, she took up her pen and wrote: "It is raining, in heaven and on earth. For you must include the rain of confetti, which has become the fashion in this Paris, where everybody takes pains to look as if he were enjoying himself. As for me, I no longer see anything of the amusements of the street, pent up, as I am, in this hencoop" (Letter ccclxiii.). She is constantly complaining because she is no longer looking out on her Place, still less *in* her place. She deplores the high cell-like walls, that rob her even of the sun's rays, which used

¹ The jeweller, Boucheron, whose shops still occupy the ground-floor, had taken possession of the house. The Countess de Castiglione had been offered thirty or forty thousand francs if she would vacate her apartment before the expiration of her lease, but she could not resign herself to leaving it before she was legally obliged to.

² It must have required some philosophy to accustom oneself to this apartment, deprived as it was of air and utterly without care. The dust lay thick on the furniture. Doubtful and musty odours, in which the smell of dogs predominated, poisoned the atmosphere of these rooms that were always kept shut. After the Countess's departure for the Rue Cambon, the first thought was to let in floods of light and air, which had been so long banished. In pushing open the mouldy, worm-eaten shutters they broke to pieces.

to filter in through her closed shutters. She had the one consolation and resource of being *sorry for herself*, even though she never took the slightest initiative to find more agreeable shelter elsewhere. Chronic lamentation was a form of compensation in which she readily indulged, and the daily details of her boredom became the subject-matter of her unflagging correspondence.

For she drove a remarkably active pencil: I do not say pen, as she hardly ever used one. Once she held this industrious pencil within her fingers it never halted. The frequency and variety of these conversational mis-sives helped her ever to endure the neglect of the world. To write was a passion, a mania, with her; it mattered not whether her productions were rational or irrational. Neither illness nor accident, nor the sense of the futility of letter-writing, nothing, in short, ever interfered with her correspondence. There they are, the fantastic pages of this extraordinary avalanche of letters, spread out before me on my writing-desk, documents that a lucky chance has thrown in my way, in order that I may piece together from their scattered elements the traits determining the character of a woman who was decidedly out of the common. The handwriting is tall, imperious, with the lines running in streaks all over the page, the words jostling each other and overlapping. They seem to be playing hide-and-seek with the ideas. It is an all but undecipherable medley.

Those whom she thus affectionately besieged with her missives had long ceased looking in them for a steady train of thought, a well-balanced judgment, and a regular sequence of ideas and imagery. But they were sure, in advance, of being abundantly regaled with countless whimsicalities and a profusion of synonyms and epithets, poured forth pell-mell, or rather automatically evoked

in her brain, according to the caprice of the association of her mental images. They knew her style well. It consisted in passing, without warning, from one subject to another ; in starting briskly out, inspired by a fine impulse, then suddenly stopping short before the phrase was completed ; taking side-cuts, following hidden scents, into the brambles of digression ;¹ intoxicating herself with verbal sound-resemblances, without real agreement or connection. She went recklessly on, taking no pains to discipline her ideas, coming forth at the end literally bespattered with shreds of words ! She was not addressing her confidences to posterity. On the contrary, she enjoined expressly on her correspondents to return her missives, adding that on no account should they be given publicity, either during her life or after her death. No doubt she felt that with their disconcerting suggestions and hints, their puzzling reminders,² the countless obstructions of all kinds with

¹ She little suspected it, Mme. de Castiglione. The thing, as well as its name, were unknown to her ; but she suffered from that disease of style called *écholalie*, which is more general than one would suppose among occasional as well as professional writers. Max Nordau, a vigorous thinker, has curiously traced its symptoms and effects in one of the eccentric specimens of his collection, Nietzsche, the megalomaniac :—

“As soon as there arises in his mind any picture whatever, it immediately recalls to his consciousness all its related images. Thereupon, with a feverish hand, he dashes upon the paper five or six, often eight, synonyms, without noticing how this strains his overloaded and high-flown manner of writing. . . . It is also to be observed that this tumultuous assemblage of words takes place frequently in virtue of the similarity of sounds. Not seldom the vague compounding of the words degenerates into the automatic coupling of the verbs according to sound, without regard to their meaning.”

She used words in exactly the same way. But who would have dreamed of an intellectual parallelism between Nietzsche and Mme. de Castiglione !

² Mystery and disguise were becoming to her singularity, without, at bottom, injuring the frankness of her nature. At times it was a relief to her to say what she had on her mind in cipher, so to speak ; she was the more certain not to become entangled, afterwards, in any by-path, and all the freer to express herself as she liked concerning this or that person. Then she fell back on her system of metaphorical allusions, the chief preliminary to understand

which she clogged her phrases, and the thousand irregularities of a form so unbridled—no doubt she felt that such letters could only be presented and quoted by bits. She dashed off her impressions, exclamations, complaints, in hopeless disorder, just as her various emotions seized her, in order to pacify a mood, "relieve her mind," calm a spite, or satisfy her heart. It was all so much to the good if she now and then hit suddenly upon a happy phrase; if these confused pages occasionally emitted some bright and lively flashes, some witticisms or epigrams, the merit of which belonged to chance, or some expressive turn of language, spontaneous and scintillating! Chance, indeed, frequently came to her rescue. All at once the obscurity of her confused imagination gave way before an astonishingly clear-headed perspicacity. Ah! if only the co-operation that she had had a right to expect had not failed her, she would have beautifully carried through this or that magnificent design. But the firm aid had failed, words and promises had not been kept: the heart of the Elect had wavered.

Sometimes the politics of the day fixed her attention, but it was only to utter the worst surmises which the triumphant rise of radicalism inspired in her.¹ From

ing which was to possess the key. With intimate friends she had agreed upon certain signs, of which they alone knew the real meaning. Among them were certain formulas which keep recurring and which it is easy enough to recall: for instance, *the uncle* is always Henri d'Orléans, Duke d'Aumale; *the nephew* is sometimes the Comte de Paris, but more generally the Duke de Chartres, whom, by preference, she calls *the Colonel*. The Countess Coiffier or *the aunt* (in allusion to *the uncle*, the Duke d'Aumale) are customary tags for herself. *Le Pays* is Cassagnac; *La Rosse*, a pet name for Dr. Janicot; *The Norman*, the young Estancelin; and *L'Enfant*, Dr. Hugenschmidt.

¹ "In this terrible end of the century, where there's nothing left for one except to let one's self be taken and hanged, I prefer the Jews to the Freemasons; for this will happen to the Rothschilds, as sure as fate. I said as much long ago, under the Empire, to the great baron, in his deserted Boulogne. What times these are! . . . They have cut down the trees in the Invalides in order to build a railway station. . . . Is it not a pity?" (Letter cxli.)

time to time her thoughts travelled back to the country of her birth, and with a rare insight, she foretold the events in store for Italy and its king. But she always returned quickly to personal questions, or to the affairs of her near neighbours which more closely concerned her and hers.

For certain persons, of whom she was sure, she kept an unalterable friendship, even though they might be separated from her by distance or even by motives for which she never demanded an explanation. If she learned of any happy or sorrowful event in their lives, she made the appropriate sign, reminding them that they still held the old place in a corner of her heart. Thus the Duke of Vallombrosa often received long letters from her, recalling a long distant past. He had been present at Mme. de Castiglione's marriage, and had never forgotten the dazzling impression ; but for a long time he had ceased to see her, although they were both Parisians and almost neighbours. The main stream of her correspondence went to the faithful friends who had never failed her. It flowed abundantly for her princes, for the lord of Baromesnil, for Cléry, for her rare visitors and her familiars. To them she gave herself completely. . . . The Countess's friends ! . . . I have mentioned them as a group, but it is time to make more intimate acquaintance with them, in all the detail of their relations with the beautiful politician of the Tuileries, who had now become the disenchanted recluse of the Place Vendôme and the Café Voisin.

CHAPTER VII

THE COUNTESS'S LAST FRIENDSHIPS—HER PRINCES

Napoleonist or royalist, as the case might be—Beginning of relations with the Orleans family in general and with the Duke d'Aumale in particular—How, under the Third Republic, the Countess de Castiglione contributed to bringing Henri d'Orléans back from exile—Grand projects and immense disappointments—Nearer the earth; in intimacy—Princely visits—A sworn hatred to pearl-grey gloves—Almost jealous of Léonide Leblanc—Slanders—Misunderstandings and reconciliations—The genuine affection cherished by Mme. de Castiglione for the Duke d'Aumale, in spite of wounded vanity—From the uncle to the nephew—The faithful friendship of the Duke de Chartres—A sentimental tie lasting several years—Revival of imperialist memories—Prince Napoléon and Mme de Castiglione—The end of princely friendships.

THE princes of the House of Orleans had their special place, as of old, in her deepest sympathy. These sympathies dated from before the Empire: the Prince de Joinville had known her as a very little girl, with her hair in curls. Nor had her sentiments weakened during the Napoleonic ascendancy, and they survived it. Under the Empire, and afterwards, the Duke d'Aumale uniformly maintained towards her a tone and bearing of tender familiarity. As for the Duke de Chartres, he was as near to her heart as it is possible to be with a woman whose fascination envelops your entire being.

Ever since her visit to Orleans House in 1857, a delightful experience crowded with unanticipated events, like some agreeable episode in a romance, Henri d'Orléans had cherished for her a sincere affection. Though capable of neglecting his friends, he found frequent oppor-

tunities to prove to her that she, at all events, was an exception. He was wont to send her flowers, delicate souvenirs of their friendship and tokens of exile, as well as his books, unbound.¹ They often exchanged letters. Immediately after the Prince's second return to France these relations became particularly cordial. She herself had greatly contributed, with the assistance of devoted friends, notably Léon Cléry, to hastening the moment of his return. The fact has been hitherto unknown, and it deserves to be reported in some detail.

One day she surprised Cléry by asking him : " How much longer will his Highness continue to confine his melancholy promenades to the region between the Place Sainte-Eudule and the Herbmmarket ? "

On the next day this famous barrister was called upon to preside at a banquet which assembled the members of the Association of the former students of the College Henry IV., the old institution where the Orleans princes had played their schoolboy games with the other children of the nation. Happy reminiscences of their distant and regretted youth bloomed once more at this fraternal repast, and they dined well and joyously. At the fatal moment of the toasts, when conversation drops, leaving the field to the orators, one of the speakers, and not the least distinguished of the company, put the question :² Why was not their illustrious school-fellow, the Duke d'Aumale, among them that evening ? The purpose of their Association was not limited to uniting, from time to time, with their scattered comrades ; it implied, above all, an ideal of mutual aid and support in material or even in moral distress. Now, there were

¹ She would have preferred them bound, with his monogram.

² Paul Robiquet, a lawyer attached to the Conseil d'État and to the Cour de Cassation.

many kinds of misfortune besides pecuniary ones. The Duke d'Aumale had put his sword and pen, honourably and devotedly, at the service of his country. Yet he was languishing in a foreign land. The hardships of exile were once more weighing him down. Only the day before, the Government had rejected the petition of the Institute asking that the sentence of banishment be revoked.

Cléry rose to reply. Having never seen the Duke d'Aumale, he could not be suspected of playing the toady. But the idea put forward by Paul Robiquet seemed to him so generous and so just that, if the mission were entrusted to him, he would act as intermediary with those in power. The committee at once begged him to do so. The very next day he obtained an audience with President Carnot, disclosed the object of his mission, and had no trouble in gaining his sympathy. Charles Floquet was then Prime Minister. Léon Cléry was an old friend of his. They had become intimate as barristers at the outset of their careers. On leaving the *Élysée*, Cléry went to see him. "I am certainly convinced," said Floquet, "as Monsieur Carnot told you just now, that a decree recalling the Duke d'Aumale from exile would please everybody. But here we are in the thick of the Boulangist struggle, and if I took up such a cause as this, it would be proclaimed from the housetops that we were seeking support from the reactionary Right. We shall have to await the outcome of this crisis. In a week we'll talk of it again."

On Saturday, the 28th of January, Alexander Dumas' romantic drama, *Henry III. and his Court*, was being given at the *Théâtre Français*, and Léon Cléry, an habitué of the house, had taken care to be present. He chanced to be seated not far from Charles Floquet, the leader of the

Government, who was very much in evidence in a front box of the first tier. Availing himself of an *entr'acte*, he accosted the Prime Minister, reminded him of their previous conversation and of his promise, and lest he should forget, suggested that he be allowed to jog M. Floquet's memory by a written note.

"It's useless. I sincerely hope that Boulanger will not be elected to-morrow, and in a week everything will be over."

Now, events did not at all shape themselves in accordance with this forecast. The tawny-bearded general, the political warrior of the legendary black horse, swept all the voting-booths of Paris, and the Cabinet, which had considered itself solidly established in power, was overturned. In the midst of all this, Cléry returned from the Palais de Justice, meditating on the instability of republican greatness. On the way a sudden downpour obliged him to take refuge under the vault of the Carrousel Arch, when a passer-by accosted him with the words :

"Are you not afraid of catching rheumatism in this rain ?"

"And you," retorted Cléry, "are you not afraid of catching a ministerial portfolio in this crisis ?"

As a matter of fact, twenty-four hours later, the portfolio did drop into the hands of Cléry's interlocutor, who was none other than Tirard, destined to become the successor of Floquet as Minister of the Interior and Prime Minister. It was the new Minister who had the honour of signing the decree by which the gates of his country were reopened to the Duke d'Aumale. And it was he who had the good sense to reply to Clemenceau, the everlasting leader of the opposition, when the latter reproached him with having yielded to the pressure of the reactionaries, whom he dubbed *les anciens partis* :

"As far as the *old parties* are concerned, the only ones whom I have had in view are the former pupils of the College Henry IV."

When Mme. de Castiglione learned of the good news, she announced it to those of her acquaintances who had not yet seen the papers, adding her comments with her usual frankness. As she did not approve of the somewhat Bohemian existence the Prince was then leading in Brussels—the habits, the entanglements, the subjection of mind and body which she deemed detrimental to his health—she seized this excellent opportunity to express her views on the subject with the utmost directness:

"Cléry, who is fond of me after his fashion—politically—has treated himself to the luxury¹ of bringing the lord of Chantilly back to his death-bed; and he did right, for the life of Brussels is ignoble (*une vie infecte*) and does the Prince more harm than the *coulisses* of the opera."²

At all events, the great result had been attained; and if she did not rejoice immoderately at the fact that the Prince had regained his seat under the august cupola of the Palais Mazarin (for she did not like the Academicians, and in her eccentric brain she was never able to dissociate the image of that elegant and grave company from the vision of a brotherhood of forty eunuchs, of whom she imagined the Duke d'Aumale as the predestined chief), yet it pleased her, at least, to know that the distance between her and him

¹ A gratuitous luxury, in truth. Cléry's motive was in reality utterly disinterested. He expected nothing for the service rendered except cordial thanks; and even these thanks were delayed on their way from Chantilly a good deal longer than one would have expected. However, he did breakfast there, and the Prince, who had to make amends, was charming.

² Letter cccliv. Unpublished papers of Cléry.

had been so much shortened. In spite of epistolary squabbles, the causes of which must be imputed to her fantastic temperament, she clung to the Duke's affection, hoping it would be sincere and lasting. Of this she had received assurances and promises. An autograph letter, signed "Aumale," reveals the secret, without explaining the meaning, of a contract of friendship, a formal engagement, which had been piously offered and loyally accepted.

Above all, as we know, she had always fostered the loftiest political ambitions. Imputing to her habitual intermediary with the Prince an influence which he was in reality far from possessing, she had dreamt of governing d'Aumale through him. Endowed with a glowing imagination which seemed to be justified by facts, this confidant in perpetuity had had occasion so many times, in her presence, to invoke the childhood's friendship which bound him to the House of Orleans by indestructible ties, their unbroken relations, the reciprocal services rendered—the multiple proofs, in short, of the ascendancy that he was able, nay, almost had a right, to exercise! She, the excitable politician, had followed blindly in his footsteps. For him, for herself, for them all, she had contemplated, as down a splendid vista, the great part that they might play. It was to be a happy and productive union, to which she would give the breath of inspiration! The Prince, backed by the most active and intelligent men of his time, with the might of his name, and of his already well-established prestige, had only to let himself be guided, to become the master; to reign, or, at least, to govern.¹

¹ "There must be two for this great work; the third need only give in quietly. . . . But, if you mean to act . . . act quickly. . . . There is just time" (Letter cxxxiii.).

Unfortunately, her judgment was misguided in believing that this brilliant future could be founded on a character like that of the Duke. The Duke avoided explanations, would make no promises, would not encourage any positive hope of which he might be the object. His was neither a nature that had become tame from habit, nor that of "the fitfully kicking horse,"¹ to use a familiar expression of her own. He was rather an irresolute leader, who disliked the idea of any adventure, who calmly weighed the chances and the risks, and who, even if he had had a strong will, would, at all events, have employed quite other means of action than those which she desired to provide. As it had become with him a confirmed conviction to regard his Norman friend solely as excellent company at table, or on a shooting expedition, notwithstanding the numerous proofs he had given of his fighting qualities, he clung obstinately to that point of view, and nothing could move him. He was glad to receive his letters as a friend, willing to let his advice enter one ear and go out the other; but he listened to his appeals without heeding them, or, if he made any sign in reply to them, it was with a sort of far-away detachment which, willingly or reluctantly, one was bound to accept.

Mme. de Castiglione was by no means always kept informed of this polite resistance or these formal refusals. She persisted in her vision of an unheard-of, magnificent *sursum*. If only she might discuss matters with him herself, directly, and as often as she desired! She employed all the gentle arts of persuasion to induce

¹ "You alone," she wrote to the author of the *Derniers jours d'une monarchie*, "know how to manage a kicking horse, if not by the bridle, then at least by the ears" (Letters).

him to respond to her invitations. Her Duke, whose presence she so urgently demanded in Paris, she would have liked also to inveigle into spending some time in her Mountain, her Italian property at Spezia, which was still worthy of receiving such a guest. Since "his Haughtiness" and "his Grace" was planning to betake himself to Zucco, why would he not deign, on the way to his vineyards of Palermo, to halt during the Spezian vintage and accept at the Palace Oldoini the simple hospitality of the *padrona*? She invented a thousand devices to recapture him. The Duke's visits came at such long intervals—What was he afraid of?¹ Every form of etiquette would be scrupulously observed, even though he was exposing himself to finding her alone and perhaps in bed.

Finally one day he yielded to one of her more pressing invitations, and she did really receive him with her head on her pillow. A maid had announced him, describing him as a tall, very proper gentleman, who refused to give his name, saying he had sent a black letter in advance. It was he. In a quick look the Countess took in the customary disorder of her room, and though there were no mirrors about her, a hand-glass within reach informed her that she was not at her best that day, and that her face showed traces of her fretful moods. But she realised, at the

¹ "The day depends on God, the night depends on Him, on his Highness. Since a long time I have not been able to dine; but in order to see each other, supping is not a necessity, and we can talk to one another in a bedroom. It is a royal duty to visit the sick, and the right of princes who have reigned or destined to govern. Let him come, then, to this sick-room, let him come attended; otherwise he might fancy he was to be received *without bracelets*. Etiquette will be severely enforced in the slightest details. Inform him of all this, and if he makes up his mind, let me know the day when the lamb is coming. I shall not eat him, because I shall be in bed and Georgette . . . (her servant) will be à l'école des hommes."

same time, that this was a fleeting chance and that she would be singularly imprudent to let it escape her. She carefully slipped under her pillow a letter [she had just been writing in pencil, in which, curiously enough, she had been speaking, rather flippantly, of *the uncle* and of his expected visit.¹

The Duke entered, dressed in black, ceremonious and dignified; so dignified and calm that he seemed not to perceive the peculiar circumstances of their talk: she, under her bed-clothes, going into politics; he, seated at the bedside of the being who had been the most marvellous of women and who had not even yet lost all her fascination. For two hours they conversed, and she noticed with impatience that he never once put down his hat, nor took off his pearl-grey gloves. These gloves put Mme. de Castiglione into a bad temper, and afterwards, in her letters, she often made fun of them, referring to their cold and neutral colour, in frequent epigrams.² She saw nothing but his extreme reserve, his starched dandyism, his somewhat grim politeness, and his complete indifference, and she was profoundly vexed.

Was this really the prince whom, in 1857, she had known at Twickenham, his dark blue velvet undress giving him such a note of easy elegance? *Cruelle injure des temps!* There he was, speaking in a colourless voice, without being in the least agitated or even distracted! In the woman lying there before him with her hair down, her face burning with fever, he seemed not for a single second to recognise "La Castiglione." Certainly, it would not have been the moment for extra-

¹ "'Come in', I said, putting down my pencil, and hiding *our* thoughts and *thy* words under my pillow, very certain, alas! that he would not come to discover them there" (Letter cxx.).

² "Talking of him, he came back with my portrait, but also with his grey gloves, and what's more, in evening dress" (Letter cxxix.).

vagant demonstrations; that was not what she had expected from her princely visitor, but she was all the more mortified at being unable to thaw the soul of the *grand seigneur* who remained so placid in her presence, as she knew that in the company of women he could very easily be stirred.

They talked of Gambetta, and of the future of the Republic.

With reticence Henri d'Orléans deigned to make it clear that he would not have declined the honours and duties of the Presidency, but that he would not have accepted them unless offered by the free votes of his fellow-citizens.¹ This conversation produced no bold, convincing scheme which implied an invincible force of character. They had exhausted the subject, and the Prince rose, bowed, and went away, stiff and unbending, leaving her alone with her unsatisfied dreams and her wounded spirit. She knew she had neither anticipated nor hoped from this meeting anything decisive or even confidential, yet, having found the Prince too cold, her annoyance was considerable, and even mingled with some anger.

A month went by without his having inquired after her. To remind him of her existence, a letter was written and sent by hand, so that it would reach him without fail. She expressed her impatient desire to see him again: he must not forget that her affection for him came from the heart. He might return when he liked, he would be received "*en Fils de France*." Using the language and formulas that generally please the ears of princes, she told him again that she had not renounced her longing to see the triumph of the House

¹ "He discussed politics, Gambetta, the King all the time. King he would like to be, but by *election*, and I, a woman, tell you this" (Letter cxx.).

of Orleans, and *that she would find the man required, if such a one existed.*

Then, dropping her hobby,¹ she begged him to bring her the discourse he was preparing for the Academy: they would meditate over it together; her intimate thoughts no doubt being that French readers would say: "How dexterous with words is this prince, and how useless in action!" She ended by asking him not to postpone his visit, and to send her a brief word in advance, so that she might spare him a possible meeting with a Thiers, a Bonaparte, or *some Bourbonite.*

He did delay, however, and she lamented. Her heart accused him of having committed the unpardonable sin of forgetting her. "It was not, however, such a long time back, and had he already forgotten it?" He, who considered exile one of the worst afflictions, surely must remember that if he had been permitted to return to France sooner than he could have hoped, it was due to her aid, to the skilful intervention she had inspired and stimulated. His remembrance of this service must be very fleeting if he fancied that a card in his handwriting, or brief and hurried thanks—such as he had addressed to Cléry—freed him from all other obligations.

The smallest pretext, a mere nothing, sufficed her desire to banter the dear Duke: a sitting at the Institute,

¹ It went hard with her to cast it aside completely. Very much later, she wrote again in terms stripped of the respect due to a prince who deserved better: "There is still time, though they did not give me any at the proper moment. Even now, all worn out, all powerless as he is, perhaps I could still make something of him. But it would be necessary: first, to relieve him of the impotent gang surrounding him; secondly, that he should really know me, as the Duke de Chartres does, and above all, that he should see me at work. Finding himself on the throne, he would no longer consider us as marplots, nor any longer look upon you as a man of sport, women and wit, nor upon me as a man's woman and an eccentric" (Letter ccxxi.).

a dinner at Chantilly, a journey, or the idea he had of transporting his Parisian penates to an apartment that had previously been occupied by Rouher, a former minister of the Empire.¹

Towards his Royal Highness, the gentleman born, the valiant soldier, the gifted organiser, in short, towards d'Aumale, in a word, Mme. de Castiglione's style of address more and more lost the tone of respect. But why had he not acted, struck while the iron was hot? Why was he only an unattached prince when he might have been President of the Republic or King? And then there was her personal grievance—his visit to her as if with his eyes shut (oh, the recollection still burned deep into her heart)—as if she had not deserved from him more attention, if only to remark that the gleaming blue stars of her eyes were as dazzling as ever, that she still had beautiful shoulders and fine clear features! In this mood mingled of wounded pride and honest disillusionment, she had almost reached the point of rejoicing at the petty slanders bruited either in society or outside society, of which the Duke d'Aumale was the object. Such gossip, as a matter of fact, was unstintingly provided her. She complacently focused all such echoes, and quickly passing from a play of mere malice to intentional sarcasm, Mme. de Castiglione, in her new letters, spared the private life of *the uncle* as little as she did his political supineness.

Was he aware of this, or did he simply treat it with contempt? At all events he never remonstrated, con-

¹ "The Duke d'Aumale has thrown his golden lilies on the rubbish-heap; sold his gratings, doors, windows, and window-fastenings; left the Faubourg Saint-Honoré and hired Rouher's nest, whence he has a view of the Élysée. He might from his bed take part in the deliberations of the Ministerial Council. Decidedly, his Highness has an unfortunate passion for inheriting . . . the habitations of the imperial ministers" (Letter cclxvii.).

tenting himself with sending short evasive notes in response to her frequent appeals. Ought she, then, to go to Chantilly in order to see him? In the old days, she had often urgently been asked to go there; but this good habit had been lost, and there was no sign of a desire to resume it.¹ Having nothing better to do, she turned to her friend at Baromesnil.

Estancelin sacrificed himself, and seizing the pen that he was wont to use when he had to give battle to those princes, of whom he was so fond, he blazed up. Without departing from the respectful forms which he always observed, he joined to them such plain allusions, such veiled, but quite intelligible criticism, as well as such direct censure as were hardly likely to give pleasure in the House of the Condés. The Duke d'Aumale always chafed when his friends laid down the law, and he never failed on such occasions to show it by the tone of his reply, which easily became somewhat haughty and kindly disdainful, and always witty. The following is an excellent example:—

“CHANTILLY, *Saturday*.

“MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have just received your letter, and, reversing the customary saying of the Arabs, I declare to you that I do not understand the sense of it.

“You think it would not have given me pleasure to see you to-day at Chantilly. Did I commission any one to tell you so? Are you, then, afraid of meeting such bad company here? To be sure, you would have

¹ “The only thing left me, then, is to go after him myself, and yet. . . If one succeeded in catching him, he would not yield himself up entirely. . . unless he were tipsy, and he does not drink. . . . Speaking of that I was not at the reception of this Monsieur de France, who no longer invites me—a fact the world finds singular. You are his friend, and I advise you to inform him of this, and I wish this new lesson of his preceptor’s may bear more fruit than the preceding ones did” (Letter ccxxv.).

met a few deputies of the Right, some acting sub-prefects, some reactionary departmental councillors.

"You '*know all that's going on,*' you write me, underlining the words. You are really extraordinarily clever, and I offer you my best congratulations. But what, after all, do you mean? Of whom are you speaking—of the deputies—the senators? What is that to me? . . . But,

"If you please, is it to me this discourse is addressed?"

"In that case, my dear friend, I caution you that, whatever the tales that may have been told you concerning me, your credulity has been strangely abused.

"I do not grasp your allusions to my distress, my rheumatism, my faults, being determined to take whatever comes to me from you in good part, and wishing to remain—Your affectionate friend,—HENRI D'ORLÉANS."

In the interval he had applied himself to soothing Mme. de Castiglione. He had sent her a message, announcing that on a certain day he would have the honour of presenting his respects to her, accompanied by his nephew, Chartres. Instantly appeased, she promised herself to do full honours to her guests and to receive them "presenting arms"—the arms becoming to her sex. She immediately conceived the idea of making herself pretty, and of resuscitating the glittering finery that had heightened the charm of "the Queen of Etruria."¹ Alas! she put herself to useless expenditure. The day arrived, but the Princes failed to keep

¹ "In order to appear beautiful to the master, I had prepared all new, fresh, rich, handsome Court attire, suitable to my air of a queen . . . of Etruria! And the costume and the conversation of the d'Orléans kept their virgin purity! Because neither the uncle nor the nephew wanted any of it . . ." (Letter cclxxvi.).

their appointment. When they did come, the week after, they came as a surprise, but the effect she had been ambitious to produce did not hit the second mark.

Her disappointments at d'Aumale's hands became more bitter every time, and she was not of a nature to bear them with equanimity. This was betrayed in her too vivacious letters, in the innumerable epigrams which she launched against the author of these stings. When told of a marriage proposed between Henri d'Orléans and the heiress of one of the great aristocratic houses of France,¹ her mockery knew no bounds. She called down upon the consorts all the blessings of heaven, and, as in a fairy-tale, wished them a great many children—*if they were able to have them.*

Nor did time pacify her. Finally, in her prejudiced eyes, the Duke d'Aumale had only the look and value of a frail old man, worn out in body and mind. One of her favourite shafts was to impute to him a certain alleged *bashfulness*, which, according to his friends and acquaintances, was certainly not, however, the Prince's cardinal virtue.

At this period he was held fast in a love-net that had been consummately cast. The Countess de Castiglione was not the first to hear of it: all Paris knew it at the same moment. "He is up to his neck in *white*,"² she cried, and, with a touch of spitefulness that made her unjust to the hero of Africa, she added: "He is there openly, brazenly, and for the first time he is giving proof of boldness." According to her asseverations,

¹ "At last," they say, "he is going to marry another widow. I have not had time to inquire whether it is I whom they assert to be his widow. The papers mention Mme. de L——. God keep them in His holy care" (Letter ccxxix.).

² "When I, sister of France, look for this man, I do not find him. One meets him, by accident, always dressed in *white* (that is to say, in the society of Léonide Leblanc). Then he bows and passes on . . ." (Letter ccxxii.).

his "Haughtiness" had been seen in the company of this courtesan, and showing her off in public places.¹

The *liaison* of Léonide Leblanc with Henri d'Orléans (as I have already pointed out in a former work in speaking of that actress) had been the great event in her amorous career. She was skilful and calculating, and she used this relation for all it was worth, deriving from it all the advantages—direct and indirect—which it was possible to reap from so valuable a protector. The Prince finally freed himself from this bondage by a ransom of 25,000 francs' income: without, however, securing his complete independence. He had formed other ties of a more dignified and elevated nature, but Mme. de Castiglione was not more disposed to forgive the "Dame des Champs" (thus maliciously distorting her real name) for being the congenial object of his affections. If one can believe the Countess, jealous restrictions, annoying obstacles, must certainly have emanated from that source, tending to thwart any meeting between her and the Prince, and to alienate him from her.²

Thus the successive disappointments of the Countess de Castiglione inspired in her appreciations of the Duke d'Aumale a note which, too frequently, to say the least, was anything but courteous; while in her inmost being she preserved, at the same time, an ineradicable sympathy for him. Yet she had become blind to the presence in him of any other traits than those inspiring

¹ "But—I saw him, I myself, from my window, saw him come quite openly to lunch at Voisin's—he, who does not wish to be seen and who accepts no invitations! Bid him farewell for me, therefore, till we meet in the next world" (Letter ccii.).

² "I begin to believe that the Nephew was right to wager that the Uncle would not see me. And it is because he is afraid of me, because the 'Dame des Champs' forbids him. She is quite in the wrong. Moreover, if he were young, but under these conditions and disabled!" (Letter cc.).

his "mistakes of conduct" and his unfortunate lack of resolution in political matters.¹ But the Prince possessed another side: he had a broad mind, abnegation, patriotism worthy of all praise; he had served his country with honour and glory; in mind and heart he was pre-eminently French. But Mme. de Castiglione was not one to weigh or reason out, to balance in her brain, the contradictory elements that go to the making up of a human being. She felt only her own private rancour. She inveighed against the author of her injury. She was utterly wanting in indulgence with regard to a man who, she said, "had known only how to judge others, while he himself had stood in need of so much mercy"; she laid up against him, as being the sole responsible, her own disappointments, the loss of her illusions.

With the Duke de Chartres, who begrudged her neither letters nor visits, she was on much better terms. He certainly was the favourite because he was the Nephew, that is, the youngest, because his manners were less formal—because, in a word, she could more surely rely on him to keep his engagements. They often met for a quiet talk, he and she, in the shadowy *entresol* of the Place Vendôme, or at table in the *Salon des Roses* of the Café Voisin, which had been fitted up for the dinners of Royalties near her room. How she petted him, then! What large stores of indulgence she kept for her *canaille de Prince*, as she called him, her Robert the Strong who was twice

¹ "It is incredible the bad things one hears said of the 'grey gloves.' All the world perceives that he is backing down. . . . I should have expected different things, but there is nothing to be done with such a character . . . and in the face of this '*nothing*' everything is impossible" (Letter cxxiii.).

French: first, because he was brave, and secondly, because he was *galant*. To be sure, the Duke de Chartres did sometimes turn up at his house in the Rue Jean Goujon for reasons with which Mme. de Castiglione had nothing to do. She now and then had occasion to reproach him for vagrant rambles into forbidden grounds; but she never found him wanting in constant, strong, and sincere affection. One day in May 1892, writing to her usual confidant, she issued this good certificate for him: "If fickle in love, the Colonel is faithful in friendship."

Above all, he never ceased to show her that royal politeness which is not an attribute of all kings' sons, nor to employ towards her those delicate attentions that she had lost all hope of meeting with from her friends, the Princes. For instance, she had carried her passion for domination so far as to wish to exercise control over the flight of time, adopting the fatal thirteenth of every month as sacred to herself; and the Duke de Chartres flattered this whim of hers, by sending her regularly, on the thirteenth day of the month, a reminder in the shape of a letter. Indeed, she was much offended if her friends did not, on that exact date, thus indicate their fidelity.

The Duke's assiduity, however, depended on the nature of his motives for frequenting her. When the case was particularly urgent he announced himself by a laconic metaphorical message, of which Mme. de Castiglione was not long to catch the meaning. For example, from some distant place, Modena or elsewhere, she would receive short notes like the following: "*Saturday, the 13th.*—You will give me a lesson in Italian. I am in the humour of working at it. . . ." She had immediately seized the meaning of the Colonel's

proclamation. "It's short and bold," she remarked, and nobody could have been more inclined to encourage his taste for study.

On another occasion he sent the most wittily expressed regrets at his inability to take the fastest train to Cannes where, by chance, the Duchess and the Countess were both stopping. It was a delicate situation, no doubt, and he wanted to withdraw from it honourably, he said, in order to do his full duty as a husband and a lover. Ordinarily, however, the tone of the Duke's letters was more reserved. He knew how to make himself agreeable to the Countess in writing to her with freedom and confidence about matters that were interesting him: his cares, his joys, his hopes or his fears. During the heat of the monarchical revival, she had received from him as many as three letters in two days. "Ah!" she exclaimed, in this connection, "if he had not such respect for the law of primogeniture, both French and foreign; if he were not so extinguished, so strangled, I repeat that we should live to see things! But, as matters are, it's as if he were *pearl-grey!*"

Their sentimental *liaison* was; on the whole, extraordinarily serene. Unexpected downpours, however, now and then disturbed the tepid atmosphere of their tender friendship. After seven years passed in unison of thought, defying absence and distance, there had arisen a sudden dispute. Some woman's idiocy was at the bottom of it, and the names of the Duchess d'A——y, of the Duke de Chartres, of his son Henri d'Orléans, were mixed up in it, as well as some gallant complications connected with a sojourn in Cairo. Mme. de Castiglione had made harsh remonstrances to him on the subject, and he had retorted tartly, in a

way to which she was unaccustomed. Unfortunate words passed between them, and he rose to take leave. In making his adieux, he had not even accorded her the least she could expect from him, namely, a *countess* kiss on the forehead, not having a right to the "duchess" kiss on the mouth. Displeased, his feelings hurt, he had taken his hat and had coldly turned towards the door. Was it really to be a break? The Countess was seated in an easy-chair, a footstool at her feet, her look following him in the act of forsaking her. Just as he was about to cross the threshold, he became frightened at his action, realising that if he closed the door behind him in anger, he would probably never return. He dominated his rebellious *amour-propre*, laid down his hat, and coming back into the room, went straight to the footstool, knelt down, and remained there. . . . Mme. de Castiglione was pleased at the way their quarrel had ended, and the next day summed up the event in this appropriate reflection: "Laffitte's fortune depended on a pin. That of a woman and a man depended on a footstool."

But the experience had left its trace. Misunderstandings occurred again and again, when their feelings or their opinions differed; when a disagreement on politics accidentally supervened; and even for trifles.¹ Little repeated irritations marred their more serious mutual esteem. The Duke no longer manifested the

¹ "You don't know, then, unhappy creature, that I have committed the crime of *lèse-courtoisier*, in sending the *Journal de Rouen*, together with Estancelin's letter, to 'Le Fort.' This has authorised him to cut off all communications, which is his manner of expressing to me his displeasure. I shall deem my position very strong if, by chance, on one of his flights from across the sea to the Rue Jean Goujon, he should pardon my silence (which is both meritorious and expiatory) and come and beat his wings under my windows" (Letter to Estancelin, General Correspondence, unpublished, cxliii.).

same eagerness to hear her call and to answer: Here! She was more grieved than nettled, having to a great degree humbled the haughtiness of her former pride; but she had now to repeat more insistently her appeals, which in better days had not been necessary. She even felt herself obliged to have recourse to little devices of seduction, such as sending the Prince a box of a particular kind of matches, so as to guide his groping steps through the darkness of her stairs and the turns of her corridors. Wind-matches easily snapped, and without heat enough to relight his extinct heart, she sighed dismally.

Nevertheless, Robert d'Orléans was too generous to desert entirely, in her decline, the woman of exceptional beauty and intelligence, whom at one time he had deemed so energetic in the defence of the interests of his race and family. He returned now and then by appointment to the poor Countess's untidy lodging, sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied by *the Uncle*. It was an ancient custom of Mme. de Castiglione's to invite her intimate friends in series.¹ Again they dined in the *Salon des Roses*, and he also planned with her meetings out of doors, in order to recall old memories, as they walked side by side, with the slow steps of reverie. One day he had sent her word to meet him at the base of the Column, a stone's throw from her former apartment in the Place Vendôme. How happened it that she left him in the lurch? "Poor Chartres," she said to some one on the next day, "he

¹ "Do you remember one evening at Dieppe, when I refused to have you at dinner because your junior, Chartres, took your place? And how you came at ten o'clock? I then told him, laughingly, 'My Lord, I granted you my hospitality only till ten o'clock, and it has just struck the hour. . . . (I still have the clock.) You will have to go, because I expect my other *fils de France*, your senior. I was very glad to give you precedence over him for dinner, but it is he who will now sup'" (Unpublished Letters, cxxxvi.).

must have gone round and round the monument without beholding the approach of anything save a heavy downpour." On another occasion, when they had taken better precautions, and had met, once more united and affectionate, as in the past, she came away from this interview radiant and happy, and her mood was reflected in the very next letter that she wrote to her eternal confidant. "He is charming; he knows enough to take off, in word and action at least, his grey gloves of etiquette." The allusion was plain, but what tenacious spite against the other, who had tactlessly kept them on at the wrong moments, these accessories of the dress of ceremony.

Unfortunately, as the years went by, the Countess's situation, both material and moral, had become much complicated. She was daily growing more irritating even to her most patient friends, owing to her increasing eccentricities, her caprice and stubbornness, and the curious mixture of grandeur and vulgarity with which she embarrassed her daily life. As for the Duke de Chartres, one cannot reproach him with positive disloyalty to her, but he became more careful about committing himself,¹ and more sparing in the demonstrations of a sentiment which had ceased to bring with it dignity and calm. He had a quite justifiable dread that a more demonstrative attitude might have the consequence of evoking reiterated appeals for services. Such requests had heretofore been tactful and discreet, but they might possibly become more open and explicit if he appeared in any way to authorise them. In his extreme caution

¹ "Be sure to tell the Prince that, in regard to the Countess, he has nothing with which to reproach himself, and that he ought not to regret not having shown her all the tenderness that he has never ceased to feel for her. In my opinion his reserve was well-inspired. What now remains to be done is to rehabilitate her . . . or something like it—and above all to pray for her." (Letter from the Countess de J—— to General E——, June 1892.)

in such matters he showed himself a true Orléans, trying to steer between the double peril: that of assuming an irksome burden, if he were to yield; or, if he refused, that of having to encounter repeated and serious annoyances, owing to the excitable, even tragic nature, and to the lack of moral balance, of this fallen queen. In short, he held himself well in leash, while at the same time not forgetting his old friend; and it was to Robert d'Orléans, Duke de Chartres, that she owed some of her last and most precious consolations. Now he would send her superb bunches of roses which charmed her, reviving, for a fleeting moment, the impressions of her youth in its prime and of her ancient dreams. Now she would receive some delicate and flattering present from him, like that of his portrait, with an incomparable dedication. Thus he did what he could to give fresh life to a parched friendship, and, as it were, to steep in an invigorating bath the bruised pride of this sovereign beauty whom, in days gone by, all the world had attended.

All along, Mme. de Castiglione had been exceedingly eclectic in the choice and the cultivation of her relations. At the time when she believed in the resurrection of the monarchy in France we have seen her seconding, by sincere rather than by effective intervention, the interests of the House of Orleans; but she had not for that, either before or afterwards, broken with the Bonapartes. After all, though she affected, philosophically speaking, to hold the great of this world¹ in exceeding contempt,

¹ "Ah! the princes—one has to drive them incessantly toward the good, or hold them back from evil. And it is for all that I have undergone and borne from them (not tolerated or admitted) that I detest them all so thoroughly. Nevertheless, the stupid and jealous have always represented me as paying court and giving chase to princes" (Letter clviii.).

yet it was a keen satisfaction to her vanity to feel herself bound by a slight thread to the older branch of the Bourbons.¹ She gave out that she had rendered them appreciable service, and that, either for them or their followers, she had secretly waged more than one battle.

Take it all in all, the steadiest of her former sympathies returned to the Napoleons, for the memories of her early childhood turned in that direction. Had not her grandfather, Lamporecchi, been the guardian of their chief, the candidate for emperorship? Had she not been the pet of the Napoleonic group during their residence in Florence? The terrible Jerome, eternally sulking, from whom she, however, had received only smiles, had bent over her cradle, and he had always maintained intimate and trustful relations with her. Throughout the Countess's written tittle-tattle, there is frequent mention of walks and journeys taken in company with the most turbulent of the Bonapartes. Jerome cheered her solitude, and that sufficed for her to foretell (if only out of gratitude) his certain and speedy accession to the throne.

"I have had my republican prince—mine from Dieppe; and, like Catherine de Médicis, speaking of Henry IV., I say now and always: *He will reign*. Which doesn't prevent him from baptizing little *Canisies*² and following me to Dieppe."

How much, indeed, they had in common, what a quantity of retrospective appreciations of men and

¹ "I shall let you read two splendid letters from a devoted Bourbon, who was obliged to use all sorts of threats and violent means in order to seize the personal papers of a dead person, that had been guilty of aiding and supporting a king. It was necessary to have them stolen by a lover, and I was forced to do battle myself. For, the love of women . . ." (Letter clii.).

² Canisy, the children of the charming Countess de Canisy, who, among her associates, was familiarly called Canisette.

women were bound to enliven their letters and conversations! It was therefore with real sorrow that Mme. de Castiglione learned of the Prince's death. The news reached her suddenly. Prince Napoleon's incoherent existence came to an end in March 1891, in a Roman hotel, not far from the chapel where rest the remains of the Princess Borghèse, near the palace where the widow of the great emperor died, blind and forsaken. He had in him the stuff of a hero of adventure, but Fortune obstinately refused to allow the historic hour to strike for him, and he disappeared, shrouded in mystery. Prince Napoleon had ended like most of those of his race who were destined to exile or an early death.¹ The Countess was sincerely afflicted by this loss, and she felt the blow all the more keenly as, besides the sense of personal loss, she was really heart-broken for another reason. She knew she had a right to certain keepsakes, but in consequence of an incomplete testamentary provision, she beheld them pass into the hands of "Saint Clotilde, the too holy, and of Saint Letitia, her daughter, the not holy enough."

There was another member of the Napoleon group—distant, secret, obscure—the mystery of whose origin need not be examined here. He, too, deeply interested the emotional nature of Mme. de Castiglione during her last years. He was young, cultivated, but of a weak constitution, and she devoted an almost motherly affec-

¹ "Would he have been Cæsar or Vitellius? He resembled both, especially the latter. He missed being Emperor of France and a reigning prince in a foreign country. He had hoped to sleep in Napoleon the First's bed; he nearly became King of Hungary. Under the third Republic he claimed the rôle of a Caius Gracchus, who should deal triumphantly both with the impotency of the Constitution and with the chronic sterility of Parliament. He had vast longings, but he clasped only dreams; the most he attained to was a mere glimpse of success and an inkling of power."—*The Life of an Empress*, by Frédéric Lolié, p. 390, and succeeding pages.

tion to him. His bad health—he had tendencies to consumption—often caused his friends great anxiety. In one of the critical, almost mortal phases of his malady, she had for a short time kept him with her, so as to be able to nurse him. The fact became known in imperialist circles, and there was a constant stream of visitors at the Place Vendôme.

“The whole of Parisian society passed through here in procession. Those who wished to, saw me; even those that did not wish to. *Night and day* I remained *dressed up and curled*, and all were dumbfounded to find me beautiful and still young—all the women of the Empire, old and ugly enough to scare you. One of them, a good friend of mine, has recently died, the Viscountess Lepic.”

On leaving for Cap Martin, the Empress had sent her faithful Piétri, but had not deemed it fitting to appear in person at the bedside of the young patient. If only, insinuated the Countess, the ex-sovereign had had the good and generous thought to reserve for him a corner of her beautiful dwelling (at Cap Martin), where the languishing, dying human plant could have revived in that radiant azure sky!

The imperialist group occupy a considerable space in the strangely jumbled mass of the Countess's letters, all of them undated and impossible to classify. One of the latest allusions to a Bonaparte is to one of the real members of the great family; but she mentions him almost in bitterness. She recalls how his wife had brought him not only her love, but a *dot* of forty millions of francs; yet at the funeral service of the Princess she had found him hard. During this ceremony gloomy reflections overtook Mme. de Castiglione. She had had the sad surprise of finding herself almost alone in the

church of Saint-Cloud. What had become of the dispensers of compliments, of the ardent friends, who not long since had crowded into the nave, too narrow to contain these members of a rich Parisian parish? The Prince himself seemed to be taking no real part in the funeral service. He gave his hand to the few persons around him with an absent-minded air. Paris had not "put itself out." Saint-Cloud had appeared too far away.

"All the same," remarked the Countess, "the Avenue of Acacias, which is the road to Saint-Cloud, was filled, two hours later, with smart society. That's Paris and the Parisians!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE COUNTESS'S LAST FRIENDSHIPS—HER INTIMATES

Those that were left her—The conversations in the dusky *entresol* of the Place Vendôme—Who some of her friends were—One of them—Fifty years of a man's life—A highly endowed nature—A long and active existence—A brilliant start—Under Louis-Philippe—His first step forward; counter-effects of a revolution—Awaiting the *Coup d'État*; what happened at the house of the Countess Lehon—Action swiftly follows words—Eighteen years of silence—Political resuscitation of "Young Estancelin"—Too many hopes betrayed—A consolation for political disappointments—Intimacies with women—Victories and successes of a mighty Nimrod of the sex—Epistolary indiscretions—Romances and love-letters—'Twixt the devil and the deep sea—What Mme. de Castiglione herself thought of him—The Countess's frankness—The ups and downs of an irregular correspondence—Her sincere affection, notwithstanding the uncertainty of her temper, for the most faithful of her confidants.

IN addition to her relations with princely personages, which were more or less intermittent and which were marked, as we have seen, by differences more or less embittered, Mme. de Castiglione had always retained a coterie of really close friends who had stood by her, alike in her joys and sorrows, who were perfectly acquainted with the eccentricities of her temperament, and who were ready to sympathise with her in her mental and moral worries.

The letters which she indited by hundreds contain frequent mention of them, and often even give us interesting particulars. At one time we find her referring to Cornély, that clever but not always very stable journalist; at another, we note, singled out from among the group,

the expressive features of Paul de Cassagnac ; and, yet again, we are brought into contact with the professional figure of Dr. Janicot, but oftenest with that eminent lawyer, Maître Léon Cléry.

This remarkable jurisconsult is worth more than a passing notice. He was the most quick-witted of barristers. It was said of him that once he took up a case, be its prospects good or bad, he was safe to win, so keen was the pleasure taken by the bench in listening to his brilliant pleading. This clever lawyer had accepted the perilous honour of being the guide and counsellor of Mme. de Castiglione, and he soon became the most welcome and privileged visitor in her secluded nook, to which he gave a fresh warmth and life by his constant sympathy and by the vivacity of his intelligence. Here he often met Louis Estancelin, who was one of the most intimate members of the group.

They chatted here in twos or in threes, never more, on the subjects which immediately concerned them, or revived their recollections of the past. "The Norman," as Estancelin was called, was a great lover of anecdote, and he always gave a vivid actuality to the conversation ; Léon Cléry supplied the neat touches, models of good taste ; while she interjected any and every idea that chanced to be floating through her brain. The Countess enjoyed a woman's and a hostess's privilege, and always played the leading rôle. With her rich contralto voice, which was of itself soft enough and alluring enough to attract any man to her side, she would hold them enthralled while she entertained them with her stories. The daily round, the common task, had no place in her life, except when they awakened, in some special and delicate fashion, the eternal curiosity of woman. Her real intellectual interest was buried in the past.

She never wearied of recalling the period of her beautiful youth, when vistas of light spread out their perspectives in all directions before her. She recalled an epoch when she was beloved, sought after, even feared. Ministers of State, diplomats, great nobles, were to be seen daily on her doorstep. In these recollections of the heyday of her youthful triumph, the name of the Emperor himself not infrequently cropped up. When, in the dim light of her curious abode, she was in the humour for gossip, it was a rare pleasure to hear her pour forth, in her own inimitable way, a host of little whimsicalities of a more or less lively description, with regard to various distinguished personages, whose foibles were as well known to her as their better qualities. Of their petty passions, their *menus plaisirs*, or their secret amours—of the little, in fact, that remained of their dignity torn to tatters, she had retained but a poor opinion. She ruthlessly supported her statements by appropriate illustrations.

Sometimes she chanced to mix up the names of a bygone period that figured in her tales, and to get into a tangle with her *dramatis personæ*. Such mistakes, however, did not occur often. In general her memory was wonderfully accurate, and her details quite in order ; but she eschewed dates, as well as certain little particulars of her own life, which she had no desire to make known. For she had her secrets, as we shall see, which she kept even from the "Norman," whose visits and letters had become the solace of her declining years.

The best, the most constant, and the most disinterested of all these intellectual companions of the suffering and out-of-sorts Italian lady, the man who might have been more, in fact, almost her all, in her strange exist-

ence, but who had failed to seize the opportunity, and who really had no reason to regret it, was Louis Estancelin, the trusted confidant of the House of Orleans, the fighting ex-deputy, the brilliant orator, the inspirer of Pretenders, and even General, when there was nothing better to occupy his attention.

When he was in Paris and wanted to resume the conversation where it had been interrupted during his last visit, nothing was more natural for him than to quit his quarters in the Grand Hotel and to stroll across to the first floor in the Place Vendôme. He usually announced his presence by whistling in the street.¹ In a trice, bolts and bars were pushed and pulled, and the opening and shutting of doors was heard. He used to make his way without a false step into the darkened chamber, where his special arm-chair awaited him at a corner of the fireplace. On certain days he would come in, exchange greetings, and take his place, without hardly a word being exchanged on either side. Such was their tacit understanding and sympathy, that it was pleasure enough for them to feel that they were in each other's company. But he was naturally expansive and chatty. Nor did she belong to the drowsy order of beings. It was she who would go back over the gay tales of old times, which made the bright spot in their intercourse. Or, as frequently occurred, they would scan the political horizon, and talk of the Princes and of Eu.

The Princes often came in for relentless criticism; and so it went on until the time of departure arrived, when he would solemnly kiss the Countess's forehead, and would wish her an affectionate *addio* until the next visit, when the same preliminaries and the same formali-

¹ "Let me know when to put my *mignons* (her little dogs) in the window, and whistle" (Letter of Mme. Castiglione, ccxxviii.).

ties would be gone through with, just in the same way. Above all, he would never forget, in all seasons and at all hours, to whistle beneath the balcony. He had been given his orders, and he carried them out like a good soldier. All the more reason, they thought, after he had tramped these byways for years and had kept his tryst after this original fashion, that they should commemorate it by some token. One day the Countess sent her faithful visitor a photograph of the house—the upper windows thrown open to the light, those of the *entresol* three parts closed, with the Countess and her poodles peeping through the shutters; below the picture were inscribed the following dedicatory lines: "To my old friend Estancelin, in memory of twenty-six years of whistling."

But as I write Estancelin's name I perceive that he has never been properly introduced. Owing to the interesting and varied episodes of his adventurous life it is well worth while making his acquaintance.

Although he never rose to the highest positions, he lived to the full every hour of his long career. He had had the privilege of coming in contact with, or of knowing intimately, many of the chief actors on the political stage during several *régimes*. Endowed with extraordinary self-confidence, he displayed an energy which, though unrewarded, might have achieved great things, if he had been more listened to and followed. He had a keen wit, profound perspicacity, and he had learnt and remembered many things during the course of the various revolutions which he had witnessed. The King of the Belgians once said to him truly enough, at the close of a prolonged audience: "You are a living encyclopædia of fifty years of contemporaneous history."

He was born at Eu, on July 6, 1823, in the very hot-bed of monarchical loyalism. His family, which dated back to the Norman Conquest,¹ settled at Eu in the reign of Louis XIV. An ancestor of his, Joseph Estancelin, *écuyer*, a gentleman of Epinay, Officer of the King's Household, had administered the county of Eu for the Duke of Maine, after Mlle. de Montpensier had handed over that property to this crippled and legitimised prince. Another ancestor, his grandfather, had been appointed Lieutenant-General of Lakes and Forests in the same ducal county. Finally, his father was granted the title and duties of Receiver of the King's private estate, also in the town of Eu, where one of his uncles had been the legal representative of the Dowager Duchess of Orleans.

These hereditary offices had naturally engendered respectful and intimate relations between his family and the princes of the House of Bourbon. School-fellow of the young Duke de Penthièvre, at the Lycée Henri IV., with the Dukes d'Aumale and de Montpensier as fellow-students, he would certainly have risen quickly under the shadow of the throne, if that throne had not been shattered to atoms. He entered upon life full of courage, and with a high heart. He had the self-confidence of a lover, who sees nought but success in his path, and who looks for the immediate realisation of his hopes and ambitions.

Everything, moreover, was in his favour. He was received almost immediately at the Tuileries. Through one of his relatives, a deputy, he had access to many friendly *salons*, while the influence of another member

¹ The Flemish designated the robbers of the North by the name of *estancelin* or *esterlin*. A curious epithet, for it is also the name of a vicious fish, which devours everything that comes in its way.

of his family, his cousin the Marquis d'Ormenans, brought him into direct touch with the great houses of the Faubourg St. Germain. He made the most of the opportunity thus afforded of studying the diverse opinions which thus came in his way, while his college companionship with the young Princes held out the promise of a ready-made position in Orleanist circles. The Queen regarded him with special affection. Ambassadors, ministers, peers of France, perceiving his intimacy with the Royal Family, treated him with such marked consideration as is rarely offered to young men of his age.

At twenty he was an orphan and free. His education and this very freedom had given him a maturity of judgment well in advance of his years. He possessed an independent fortune, and, what in no way detracted from his qualifications, an iron constitution. Sport, horsemanship, and skill in the use of arms kept him in good trim without overdoing him. Moreover, good luck had endowed him with plenty of courage and promptitude, which was bound to stand him in good stead.

Received with open arms wherever he went, owing to his frank and manly disposition,¹ he attracted women because of his fine appearance and good breeding. In fact, few young men could have started with a brighter outlook. His future looked rosy indeed, and his friends did all they could to make it even rosier. He decided to enter diplomacy. In 1847, when he was only three-and-twenty, he was offered a position as Attaché to the French Embassy at Munich. This was to be his

¹ The Duke d'Aumale wrote to him some years later: "You are so entertaining a companion that it is difficult to say how much one misses you after having been accustomed to your society" (Unpublished letter, Twickenham, June 5, 1857).

first step on the road to distinction. In the following year he was ready to start on his new career. He had made up his mind, and his nomination had been duly signed. His family were to accompany him, including his mother-in-law. The Queen, it should be said, had wished him to take a wife at the age when princes marry. On a fine bright winter's morning, a well-appointed *berline* with four prancing horses, two postillions, and two footmen, proceeded down the Boulevard des Italiens towards the Strasburg Station. The party, with its ambassadorial suite, made a brilliant show, and attracted universal attention. Alas! the pleasure was but short-lived. The young diplomat was soon recalled. The Revolution of February quickly dashed his hopes of a diplomatic career.

Matters soon assumed a serious aspect. Owing to his inherent horror of bloodshed, and the pacific character of his disposition, Louis-Philippe yielded without a struggle to the revolutionists, who were surprised at their rapid success. Our young attaché was now but a mere onlooker among the crowd. His first impulse had been to fly to the Duke d'Aumale, his old school-fellow, in Algeria, and to urge him not to recognise the new Government. The Prince was at the head of an army of from 60,000 to 80,000 men. He was a brave man, adored by his troops. More than likely they would have followed him to the end. But, owing to his conscientious scruples, whenever the principle of legality was concerned, he was prepared, even then, to hand in his resignation. He was on the point of spontaneously throwing up his command, saying, "I bow to the will of the people and retire." Estancelin would have made a great mistake if he had gone out to the Duke. His counsel would not have

availed to alter matters in the least. He could only put himself at the disposal of the Princes, render them one or two valuable services—by saving, for instance, in peculiarly romantic circumstances, the precious diamonds of the Duchess de Montpensier—bring them over to London, get back to Paris, and await developments.

The Revolution of February 24, 1848, produced the double result of upsetting the dynasty of July and of overthrowing the "tricolourists," who for eighteen years had upheld it. Some went over to the Republic, others contemplated rallying to the standard of Napoleon; while a third group of the faithful, who had numerous irons in the fire among the upper middle class, composed the Orleanist party. Elected representative of the people Estancelin did not long hang fire.¹ He was born and remained a royalist to the end of his life.

By a curious coincidence his wide circle of acquaintances enabled him, under the presidency of Louis Napoleon, to mingle in widely divergent political circles. Thus, at the house of Thiers he frequented the partisans of Orleanism (Left Centre), the Diplomatic Corps, and such distinguished foreigners as chanced to be in Paris. When visiting the *salons* of the Duke de Broglie, he came among the Conservatives of the Right. Again, he met many of the same set in the homes of the Duchess de Galliera and of the Marquis de La Ferté, who was then acting for the Comte de Chambord, and was the connecting-link between the blue-bloods of the Faubourg St. Germain and the fusionists. Finally he always took his place on Saturdays at the dinner-table of the Countess Lehon² at her town-house in the Rond

¹ In 1849; he was twenty-four.

² The Countess Lehon, who played an important part in society at the outset of the Empire, in consequence of her *liaison*, publicly acknowledged, with



The Duchess de Montpensier.



Point of the Champs-Élysées, the headquarters of the venturesome and the daring.

On quitting these solemn conclaves, at which "the Burgraves," eloquent in debate, but slow to move, reigned supreme, and on entering the apartments of the ex-Ambassadress, one perceived at a glance that here was the real centre of political action.

It was in this house that was hatched the great surprise of "December Second." Under the all-pervading influence of de Morny, primitive Orleanism, which had been the dominant spirit of the place, was openly gliding towards the Empire. Here Estancelin found men of his own kidney, who, if they did not see eye to eye with him on all points, were at all events determined Conservatives, who sincerely regretted the weakness of Louis-Philippe, and who had willingly fired on the *blanquistes* of February. On the eve of the *coup d'état* Estancelin was present there at a conversation full of suggestion.

One by one the other diners had left. Only three persons remained—Morny, Persigny, and Estancelin himself. Morny, the Countess's friend, and her associate in more matters than one, had just indulged in a violent outburst against the members of the opposition of the Left, under the reign of Louis-Philippe, particularly against Duvergier de Hauranne. Persigny in his turn intervened. "We'll put an end to all that," he cried. "We'll have a Senate for the older men; a Conseil d'État for young men like you, for instance, Estancelin, and we'll rule this country, with a money-

M. de Morny, and sanctified, as she put it, by public opinion, came to Paris in 1832 with her husband, who was the first Belgian Minister to the French capital. She was a charming blonde, noted for her exquisite figure and for superb shoulders, lavishly displayed in evening dress, to the horror of the modest Queen Marie-Amélie.

bag in one hand and a dog-whip in the other. Now, let us get to bed." Two days later, the *coup d'état* had become history.

Paris, at the moment, was seething with soldiers, military activity was being everywhere displayed. Troops filled every inch of available space in the streets and on the boulevards. The promptness of the soldiers in using their weapons, the quick action of regiments in suppressing riots, were proofs that the army was taking its revenge for the events of February 24. It had been humiliated, virtually disarmed, dispersed outside of Paris; but it was now back in the capital, a powerful and feared body of troops, who were the master of the situation. The Empire had been made.

But Estancelin was not one of those who was to profit by the change of *régime*. Member of the Departmental Council of the Seine-Inférieure, he resigned, refusing to take the oath, thus winning the congratulations of the Duchess of Orleans. He saw there was no place for him in the new order of things, so calling to his aid all the philosophy he could muster, he made up his mind to devote himself to country life, not omitting the pleasures of sport, to which he had always been passionately devoted. He had no intention, moreover, of giving up entirely his keen delight in the society of women, a taste he had at no time ceased to cultivate. Before settling down he made two interesting excursions into Spain, received, from the King François d'Assise and the Queen, a charming reception; and, during his stay with the Duke de Montpensier, enjoyed the proof of a friendship which went back to their schoolday experience under the elms of the old College Henri IV.

Until 1870 little was heard of him, except in the

agricultural meetings of his native Normandy.¹ On July 4 of this historic year, in the Chamber of Deputies, whither his electors had sent him after a long period of inaction, we hear once more of "young Estancelin," now risen, as it were, from a political grave. Recalling the dictum of Lamartine: "France can be more easily touched through her heart than her head," he appealed to the generous instincts of her representatives. He invoked for the Orleanist princes the right of once more becoming Frenchmen, and of returning to their native land. His eloquent pleadings produced in this Imperialist Chamber what I might term a dynastic sensation. A few days later the Franco-German war broke out, and was followed by the preliminaries of the overthrow of the Empire.

Appointed by the Government of National Defence general in command of the auxiliary forces distributed throughout the three Departments of the Seine-Inférieure, the Eure, and the Manche, Estancelin soon gave proof of his devotion and energy. It was at this time that the Duke de Chartres took up his service in the army of Normandy, under the name of Robert le Fort, the secret of which was alone—or almost alone²—

¹ He had stayed in Normandy looking after the private affairs of the Orleans family. On the outbreak of the revolution in 1848, he came to the conclusion that the time was not far distant when the properties of princes would run the risk of a change of owners, and he determined to save what he could by obtaining a lease of the Great Park of the Château d'Eu with its immense farm and other adjacent dependencies. He took up his abode in this beautiful place, which had been taken over by Louis-Philippe on his accession to the throne; and when the decrees of confiscation were promulgated on January 22, 1852, he at once purchased the property put up for sale (while awaiting their return to the House of Orleans). He thus prevented the inevitable breaking up of the estate; the Comte de Paris was enabled, twenty years later, to take possession of the Royal Château, with its dependencies complete and suitable for his occupation.

² The Countess de Valon also was aware of it, when one evening a French officer, who was none other than the Duke de Chartres, was announced at the

known to but three persons—Estancelin, Lieut.-Colonel Hermel, and the Countess de Castiglione.

On the conclusion of peace Estancelin continued his activity. When, during the Commune, Paris was in flames, and the prisoners were being shot, he left for England to say to the Comte de Paris: "We must go to-morrow to call on the Comte de Chambord and the monarchy will be made." Unhappily for the hopes he had entertained, the Princes trusted only in the word of Thiers. His advice was discarded, and the opportunity was lost.

These were stormy times. Political affairs, with their shifting tide of riots and revolutions and the sudden coming and going of leaders, favoured the unscrupulous. Estancelin was a man to tackle a problem face to face. He was a man of unflinching principle, who never swerved from the path. But the heirs of the monarchical tradition whose cause he had espoused either no longer had the wind in their favour, or, when matters were favourable, they lacked the decision necessary for success. Courageous, remarkably intelligent, his brain teeming with ideas, Estancelin remained faithful to the end to convictions of another age. He drew from this attitude the sole satisfaction of having done his duty, without either glory or profit to himself.

Politics was for him a disagreeable and uncertain mistress. But he had, throughout his life, compensations of another kind, which helped him to bear its disappointments and to pass pleasantly the rest of the time.

He was not an Adonis, or a miracle of beauty. But

Château de Rozay as M. Robert le Fort. He was on his way to join his regiment. It was a new experience for this French prince thus to have to make his way through dark woods, as a price had been placed on his head by the Prussians. (Cf. Frédéric Loliée in *Les Femmes du Second Empire*, p. 286.)

he had the gift of magnetism ; he was what in the seventeenth century was called a *voleur de dames*. For many years of his life women were generous and devoted to him.

Some of them, like Mme. de Castiglione, had conceived for him a great place in the rôle of fame which it was never his good fortune to fill. He came in contact with many whose devoted tenderness persisted in seeing in him something more than merely an amiable, entertaining, even fascinating companion ; something more than merely the active—but powerless—lieutenant of a forlorn hope. They judged him, in exalting him, out of the fullness of their hearts. They looked upon him as a being apart, an impression created by his undoubted great distinction, a distinction in which physical charm played a not unimportant part.¹

But whatever the reason, serious or frivolous, passionate or platonic, it is certain that Estancelin frequently aroused the most extraordinary affection.

By what happy accident are all these letters, written by women to one single individual, lying there now before me, exposed to the light ?

They are inscribed by different hands in different styles of writing. But in one and all burns the same undying flame of love and adulation.

We have all the phases of the tender passion, from the unintentionally witty and intellectual to the sentimental, the entreating, the imperious forms of the malady ; and there are others of a sensuality demanding averted eyes and oblivion. It is the old and everlasting story.

¹ The effusions of a certain Mme. X., for example, virtually amounted to pure idolatry. We use the word "pure" advisedly, for she was no longer young. Another person, who heaped upon him at once her adulations and her favours, regarded it as a glimpse of Paradise to read, to write, or to work in his company, as secretary, while he dictated.

One series in particular, emanating from the hand of a person who must remain anonymous, but who was well known in society, is characterised by a spontaneity, a verve, a repartee, a sparkling vivacity, a happiness of expression which would not have disgraced the pen of a Lespinasse. Let us turn over a page or two and see what they contain: a little harmless curiosity is no crime.

We are on the morrow of the decisive meeting. The hand that holds the pen trembles with agitation. Once awakened, initial desire has become self-confident, and expresses itself in language whose circumlocutions are so transparent that the reader at once divines how short is to be the period of resistance. Here are all the signs of that feverish electricity which is induced by long waiting for the lover, and is exasperated by the thought of the impossibility of flinging oneself immediately into his arms.

The great climax will not be long in coming. But what a world of emotions are experienced in anticipation! Such a creature really deserved to be addressed in the words used by a famous lover of the eighteenth century writing to a no less famous woman:—

“The women of Granada are not worthy to be your pupils; your soul has been warmed beneath the rays of the Lima sun, and the Spanish women, in comparison with you, seem cold as the icebergs of Lapland.”

The letters of this woman, steeped to the lips in love, show at a glance a condition of intense physical impressionability. They betray, unmistakably, the keenest power of self-hallucination as to what is shortly, perhaps very shortly, to take place. Dazzling vistas rise up before the writer's eyes. She experiences by intuition, before she has tasted them, sensations following each

other in rapid succession, so perfect in their apparent reality that her head swims in anticipation. And afterwards! The domination of the being who has entered into her life is so firmly established that she swears to him over and over again that time can no longer work on her its vengeance.¹

From that day on he is to be for her (as is the case with all women who adore the one and only lover) the personification of all that is high-minded, adorable, and great in the world.²

How resist him? His veins seem to breathe fire. His blue-black eyes "shine like a tropical sun." To bring him back to her side, to live again with him in imagination the unspeakable moments, she pens a fresh letter to him daily, more ardent in expression than its predecessor, only less ardent than the one she is to send him on the morrow.³ This is adoration in all its force, unbounded and illimitable.

¹ "When he shall have passed fifty, even sixty years, what does that matter? I shall always worship him. Never will I cease to regard him as my master, my lover, my life, my all."

² "In spite of the buffetings of Fate, you have all the qualities of intelligence, all the high instincts of the heart, all the germs of the noblest attributes of the mind."

³ "My God, if I loved *You* as I worship this man, I would be worthy to be transported to a seventh Heaven."

"He whom I adore as I ought to adore my God. . . ."

"Separated from you who are the light of my life. . . . I am in the dark . . . I am overcome. Separated from you, sole object of my regard, still more of my thoughts. . . . All is a blank. . . . I am plunged in darkness . . . ; I am blind."

"Alas! the letter of the Princess de R—— at Mont-Dore shows but too plainly that you spoke unthinkingly to her. And from words to acts, given your manner of life and a nature like yours, the gulf between them is but a narrow one."

"What are you doing? What are your thoughts and, perhaps, your amusements? My eyes seek for you and find you not. I am all in the dark, moping, groping among a thousand stumbling-blocks, a thousand hidden snares, evoked before my senses by a pitiless and hopeless jealousy. Oh! torments of the blind, how well I understand you!"

Such success has its seamy side. There is a rift within the lute of this unbroken harmony; there is the husband, who is always spoken of as *he*, who is worthy of all esteem, whom one would wish to love, but for whom one feels nothing but pity. And there are other troubles, other fears, and the biting return of jealousy. The kiss of the other day was only a snatched and an unsatisfying one. Had he already replaced her in his heart! She knew but too well that *liaisons* of this kind must have an ending. His inherent frivolity, or his indifference, had they already brought matters to a crisis? The very notion of an oblivion so swift seemed to freeze the very marrow in her bones. Too vast for so sensitive a nature is the field of alarming suppositions.¹ Her state of mind and language then become those of discarded lovers whose thoughts are directed solely to lugubrious images; in whom everything becomes merely an excuse for distress and morbid melancholy. They know not where to seek the recuperative force to contend against such deep-seated and diverse impressions. "Oh, how often we die before our day of reckoning really comes!" cried Mlle. de Lespinasse.

One feels the approach of the first rude awakening of moral uneasiness. The victim timidly puts herself on the rack, and is alarmed as to the consequence of a fault too dearly enjoyed in the sight of Heaven. Having given herself up to the battle of the passions our Unknown Lady can no longer hope to escape the inevitable

¹ "If I look into your past, it tells that man's love is but fleeting. If I look into the present, the reply is that the expression of my love ought to be denied me. If I look into the future, it speaks to me of reparation. If I address myself to my heart, it responds that it is preparing for itself endless pain. If I let my conscience speak, alas! it is shocked, and points on the one hand at my tarnished innocence, lost to me beyond recall, and on the other to the punishment that God has in reserve for me, perhaps, if I don't abandon the propensity which enthrals me."

crisis, the fatal state of mingled pleasure and pain, of balm and of poison. Nay, she shuts herself up in her sorrow, she gives way to her train of reflections, tries to persuade herself that she revels in her sufferings, or in the consolation of giving expression to them. Constantly her tormented soul reverts to the themes that are so dear to all passionate natures: complete self-oblivion and self-sacrifice, if it be love's recompense ever to renounce; the desire of sacrifice for the satisfaction of him who enchains and enthrals her; the intervals of weeping and of heart-misery; the shrinking of a melancholy soul, almost happy in its pain, because even the pain speaks to her of the object which is its cause. Then, as happens invariably with a passionate and pious nature, when the imagination and the senses have had their fill of all that the excitement, the joy, the infatuation, the transports of satisfied passion can inspire, the still small voice of conscience intervenes. There ensues the phase of reaction after pleasure, repentance taking the vacant place of past indulgence, the victim too downcast to raise her voice against him who is the author of her joys and sorrows.¹

This correspondence throbs with every conceivable form of amorous emotion of which a woman's heart is capable. Ah, yes, *le cœur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît pas.*

¹ "I respect myself no longer. I despise myself. I want to fly from you, but I have not the strength of will. . . . My thoughts follow you wherever you go. I am sick with grief. I am weary of weeping, weary of constantly leaving you. I detest and curse each day, everything that I used to love before. I live in dreams only, hateful dreams. Nothing interests me any more. I avoid all that I once wished for. What used to delight me now revolts me. Music has no more charms for me. Reading bores me. Visiting is positively detestable to me. I have but one desire, one passion, one remorse. That is always you."

Such were the passions that this man was capable of inspiring. He awakened others less profound. These were but passing amours; little affairs of a few days, temptations of an idle hour; flames that warmed without burning, and that were easily extinguished. Here and there, they savoured of the romantic. Beyond the confines of his Norman home he had taken part in some rather daring escapades. The great friend of Mme. de Castiglione (to whom we shall return presently) related to us one evening after dinner one of these adventures, and how he managed to escape from a fairly awkward situation. The tale is diverting. I give it as it came to me. It has all the flavour of a *nouvelle galante* of the old time.

A gentlewoman, who was passing the summer in her château in the country, had invited Estancelin to come and see her late one night. In all probability he would find her alone. Her maid (a pearl of great price) had been informed. The lover had been furnished in advance with all the necessary information and directions. He was expected between ten o'clock and midnight. The flickering light of a candle, placed behind the window of the linen-closet, was to serve as his sole beacon. He had but to follow this guiding star and trust to Providence, or rather the chapter of accidents.

He had to scale a park railing and to penetrate into a house where a large staff of servants was kept, without being seen by a living soul. Inside all preparations had been carefully made for his reception. The window of the dressing-room was to be left ajar, and the blinds half open. The night was windy; thick black clouds obscured the light of the moon. Of a sudden the clouds dispersed, and the moon flooding

the grounds revealed a broad path, some twenty-five to thirty feet wide, overspread with a thick yellow sand, so fine that the foot of a nightingale could not have passed over it without leaving its imprint behind. It was noticeable, moreover, that the path had been very carefully raked. Here was a dilemma! But our hero was equal to the occasion. He at once saw that it would be impossible for him to cross the path without the gardeners, who came on duty at daybreak, at once perceiving the traces of a man's footstep, and noting that he had worn heavy hobnailed boots. The risk of compromising *her* was not to be thought of. Yet there they were waiting for him. What was to be done? A happy inspiration flashed across his brain. The servants would certainly be concerned at the sight of strange footsteps that, crossing the walk during the night, had proceeded in the direction of the château. But they would in nowise be disturbed by footprints of a person coming *from* the house, as they would doubtless be taken to be those of a retainer, of one of the labourers on the estate. Around the building was a slab pavement about six feet in width, which would tell no tales. Yet he must manage to get to it. He determined to cross the tell-tale path by proceeding, crab-like, backwards. Success crowned his efforts, and on reaching the paved walk all traces of sand were removed from his boots by a few puffs of breath and by flicking off with his handkerchief those particles of sand which stuck more perseveringly to the leather. It was the work of a moment to clear the obstacle and to gain access to the window of the room, where he knew he was being anxiously awaited. His friend flew to him at his approach. Their lips met in that silence which is more eloquent than most forms of utterance.

He remained a whole week in a secret room of the château, served and fed during the day by the faithful soubrette, and watched over by night by her charming mistress.

This chain of adventures was not, however, without its dramatic elements. One morning he received a long letter bearing the Venice postmark, under date May 26, 1860, and beginning:—

“Listen to me. Some one who has loved you very dearly is dying. She must tell you before it is too late; you never knew of this love, nor did any one else; to suffer, to struggle, to weep, that has been my life up to the present. But to-day, here on this spot, I am already under the shadow of the eternal gloom, all this past has disappeared from my view, and I see nought but my love and my despair. I can bear it no longer, my heart cries to me: I have suffered enough. The dying have the right to proclaim their suffering.”

Was it possible? He searched the archives of his memory. Was it at Nice, at Hyères, on the Italian highways, that this anonymous and tragic romance had had its birth? Had some unknown woman really loved him, without his ever having known it? As he was unable to throw any light whatever on the mystery he spoke of it to his intimate friends, seeking some solution. One of them, a woman of a naturally romantic disposition, was so upset, so unstrung, after reading the last adieux of the dying woman, that for several days she prayed for the soul of the unfortunate Neapolitan or Venetian, and, prompted by her confessor, she made Estancelin say Masses. The pious lady did not suspect at the time what she learned later on, namely, that the credulity of the hero of the tale had been surprised;

that, as a matter of fact, the sentimental Italian heroine who was dying of love had existed only in the vivid imagination of some facetious person or persons unknown.

In any case, it was but one name missing from the long list. Certain grave and censorious personages, however, considered that the incident, purely imaginary though it was, must have caused pangs of remorse to the man who had so unthinkingly given occasion for inventions in his case so plausible. He let their tongues wag. With his heart in the right place, his conscience clear, his feelings as a father above reproach, his moral sense was a little less rigid as to principles applying to the eternal relation between the sexes.

Indeed, this fortunate creature would really have been of a very rare temper if, among the host of his female admirers, who never ceased to the very end of his life to flatter him with their adulation, he had not persuaded himself that he possessed the true talisman.

For it lasted with him to the end. Everywhere he went, he was received with open arms by women eager to share his pleasures or console his griefs. He had long ago lost the glow and the snap of youth. Yet, he still had adorers who, though late in the field, were none the less devoted, none the less tender in their attentions. Such a one was a certain poetic Countess de X—, a voluminous correspondent. She herself had long passed the period of ardent love, but she gave him in place of it the mastery of her intellectual self. Day after day, she sent him attestations such as: "he was the perfection of man," endowed with the seven gifts of the spirit—"wisdom, intelligence, piety" . . . and I know not how many other qualities. Another, one

of the flames of his youth, in a flight of imagination still throbbing with the recollection of bygone joys, went so far as to apostrophise him thus :—

“Were God Himself to question me, I would ask Him why He had given life to beings so different from others in this world, and why He had blessed them with all the charms.”

Born to command, he was one of those whose superiority is a law unto themselves. Wielding a recognised influence, wherever he went, he was uninfluenced by others. He stood alone, surrounded by a halo of Truth and of Light—that was how he appeared to these ideally prejudiced feminine eyes.

But he was not appreciated at his true value by men, he whom God, for the misfortune of women, had made so fascinating. The trend of public events had gone against him, and reduced to a minimum his field of action. One of his most intimate friends among women put the question to him point-blank. Why should he not, in revenge, let the world know what he might have done for them? Why had he not yet finished his Memoirs? With the confidence born of admiration unduly hopeful, she predicted for them, before they came into existence, a success, a vogue that Mme. de Castiglione, less easily carried away, was far from anticipating. If he would only consent to start immediately, all would come right, yes, more than all—money, distinctions, an enhanced reputation: “You know so much,” she insinuated persuasively; “you have such piles of things stored away in your memory, such valuable documents hidden in your ancestral archives! You know so well the gift of utterance, and above all, of tactful utterance.” She even aspired to contribute her modest quota; she would classify his notes, and put

in order the tangled mass of his papers; she would arrange the pages already finished, and they would have more than enough to hand over to the copyist. "Happy copyist!" added this ingenuous worshipper; "I wonder if he will recognise his good luck in being the first to read these fascinating records."

It is true that another voice cautiously discounted these exuberances: it was the voice of Mme. de Castiglione, tending, on the contrary, to throw cold water on such illusions, not to give credence to encomiums too extravagant for his *amour-propre*, rather to measure his good and his bad points, to expect no more than a doubtful and apocryphal moral gain. Distracted between these opposing feminine influences, the one optimistic to excess, the other distinctly depressing, the harassed man made but little progress with his notes; or rather, not to run counter to either party, he took another tack, added some pages to the proposed life of *The Most Beautiful Woman of the Century*, gave out that he would publish this work contemporaneously with his *Souvenirs*, and thus found a way of satisfying the two contending parties. The Countess de C— deemed it well that her star should be in the ascendant, and the Countess de X—, gentle by nature, and of an excellent disposition, was incapable of jealousy. The latter, indeed, by the rarest of exceptions, harboured no hostile feeling against the rival of her platonic and quite harmless friendship. On the contrary, she encouraged more often than not, in her letters, her "dear Duke"—as she entitled Estancelin, for she considered him worthy to be dubbed a prince, at least—to redouble his consideration and attentions towards "the fallen Queen." *The poor Countess* was the invariable opening of her fragmentary letters concerning Mme. de Casti-

glione, and the words were employed without a thought of belittling her, or of false commiseration.

"Poor Countess," she repeated, "no, do not abandon her, even though all the rest desert her, but let your fidelity be the last consolation of her moral and physical decline!"

On another occasion she gave vent to her surprise that the "great man" had not secured sufficient moral authority and spell over Mme. de Castiglione to control and keep in check her fantastic personality, "capable of the noblest, as well as of the most inane, actions." Doubtless, she argued to herself with the best will in the world, one could not really overlook all, excuse all, the strange and, at times, quite unaccountable freaks that the recluse of the Place Vendôme indulged in; but, after all, did not her sincere and real gift for friendship, her inalienable loyalty of disposition, go far to make up for certain lapses in her keen intellect?

The "mutual friend" had no difficulty in being convinced of what was really, at bottom, his own view. His neglected correspondence with Mme. de Castiglione was renewed, and at the same time his visits became more frequent.

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Whether she rose in thought on the wings of her own too adventurous dreams, or descended into the depths of her lost illusions, certain it is that Mme. de Castiglione had never for a moment admitted that he should cut himself off completely from political life. He must not be satisfied with being the best *shot* on the country-side. Since a place was denied him in the Ministry, and since the masters of the Château d'Eu did not use their influence to obtain for him a nomina-

tion as Senator, she wanted him to be, at least, the great man of his province.

"What are you doing in your Norman fastnesses," she wrote him, "among the drooping lilies and the violets? Are you really trying, by devotion to agricultural pursuits, to secure the new Republican decoration of the colour of Hope?¹ Be up and doing, come out of your dark corner, pull yourself together . . . come up here and give me a kiss."²

Her feminine pride was overjoyed when, during the war of 1871, the Government of National Defence bombarded him Commandant-in-Chief of an auxiliary force of 40,000 men. Robert Le Fort had had his baptism of fire under him; he had led towards Paris, during the siege, the troops that had managed to get nearest to the lines of investment; he had been under fire; he had been struck full in the breast by a Prussian ball, and he had very nearly lost his life. Nevertheless, when the grades were revised later on, when all sorts of malicious epigrams were hurled against this improvised general, she also had caught the epidemic and she flung her dart at him: "I observe—and it has been dinned into my ear *ad nauseam*—that you have never really been a general, that your title is disputed, and it annoys me. The thing ought to have been proved."

Merely an ebullition of temper, to which she was so often prone.

Although he was, temperamentally, the most independent of men, as she herself had had reason to know, and as is shown by this compliment she once paid him: "The woman capable of governing you is not yet born"; although in his family circle and in the world outside he had always done exactly as he liked, he had

¹ The *Mérite Agricole*.

² Letter ccxlii.

really had to provide himself with a considerable stock of patience in dealing with his terrible and exacting friend. First it was the budget of letters which was his daily legacy—letters at once imperative, endearing, sullen, or even passionate at times, containing a flood of observations or injunctions against which his spirit revolted, particularly in his latter days. He would take his revenge by refraining from giving her any explanation, written or verbal, and would keep her in her place by seeking the society of less dominating beauties.

She did not pass through this fire unscathed. A little spitefulness was mingled with her pain, and she retaliated by assuming an attitude of wounded dignity :—

“Why haven’t you been to see me on your journey through Paris? Is it to put yourself on a par with the Princes, that you assume at pleasure airs of ingratitude, indifference, or forgetfulness? The Princes are no longer the mode, my dear. But don’t disturb yourself. I always love those who nearly loved me when I was in the fashion of the Empire.”¹

But in the best pages of this very varied correspondence she yielded at times to gentle, nay, almost tender, moods. A long virginity of heart, which had not yet been exhausted, awoke in her a desire to make up for lost time. Belated breaths of the warmer old-time feeling, which had had no conclusion in the past, now and then evoked from her such cries as these :—

“Ah! that week we passed together, at all hours, in all things, *except one!* . . .”

“One tear in your eye, my Norman, which I have never seen you shed, though I have nearly seen everything: writing, sleeping, storming, chaffing, dreaming,

¹ Letter lxi.

but not loving; and when one has not seen a man in this last state, one knows neither the best nor the worst in him.

"You must write me, write me very often, knowing how much I long for your letters (for it is still what you do best, for me who know not the rest)."

The double burden of advancing age and increasing worries weighed more and more heavily upon this admirable head. Yet, her eyes, her shoulders, her arms and hands had not yet lost all claim to admiration. Her feminine instinct had not yet surrendered, nor could it, after the boundless adulation she had enjoyed. She was at no time so certain as has been supposed, and as was so often repeated, of the loss of her beauty. But with a stubborn pertinacity she continued to multiply devices in order to hold the attention of men in that limited circle in which she had shut herself up. Any expression of homage to her old-time self, which she believed she had now and then resuscitated, was to her extremely consoling. Whenever, for the time being, her thousand and one ills abandoned her, she set herself instantly to inspiring fresh impressions.

Also, from the habit of hearing the same things said over and over again, namely, that once at all events, if not twice, and even three times, he had skirted Happiness without seizing it; pricked, moreover, by such constant allusions to the blank result of the Dieppe meeting, and put on his mettle by the goading words of the Countess,¹ the Norman put it to himself that Chance was less "bald-headed," perhaps, than the pro-

¹ "Your letter has laid bare my heart and, perhaps, something else with it," she wrote him in her bantering way. "Why did you not talk that way twenty years ago?" (Letter clii.).

verb had it; that Chance did not, after all, depend upon a single hair; and that, perhaps, a certain revival of "amorous friendship," between her and himself, would only be just reparation for a grievous past mistake. He spoke to her of it. She had to repress his vivacity. It was too late, she said—unless they decided to link their lives together for good or evil, and by a more binding compact.

A life in common. . . . He had hardly asked so much. These two words, with all that they implied of renunciation on the one side, of exaction on the other, and the consequent responsibility, for the mere recrudescence of a permanent *tête-à-tête* with a woman in indifferent health, difficult to please and eccentric—intelligent though she might be—these two words had disillusioned in a flash the momentarily excited imagination of the general. It took him little time to consider the matter. Husband, father, grandfather, deeply devoted to the members of his own family, jealous of his personal freedom, clinging to his hobbies, devoted to sport, fond of travel and loving to loaf along the way, he would be called upon to give up all those things, and for what?

If the fever of love can veil, in the idle hours of youth, the tortures it inflicts, one does not so unthinkingly risk, as years roll on, the comfort of the fireside and ease of mind. Already more than one of his former women friends had fancied that they were purifying the flame of their passion by lavishing upon him in their letters such names as "spouse," "husband," and so on, which only deceived themselves, and in no way altered facts.

The experiment would have been more dangerous in the case of a nature so wayward, so strenuous, as was

that of Mme. de Castiglione, even after she had ceased to be young. He did not recur to his proposal and quietly resumed his former place among the platonic lovers. The Countess, on the other hand, thus silently apprised of the false step she had taken, did not fail to turn it to her own advantage. She declared, later on, that it was she who had not wished to marry him, and that she would never have desired such a union. Having no better reason to offer, she wrote him again, simply and unaffectedly, as of yore, that all things considered she was of too lofty a mind, too evidently divine to accept the common yoke of servitude.¹ The question of love, therefore, was to be definitely dropped, but a profound, mutual, and lasting friendship would remain, and even to doubt it would be to her the most irreparable of injuries.

"Not to count on me? And since when, near or absent, have I given you the right to suspect the sincerity of my friendship? Have I not proved it to you by the evident pleasure I have evinced, no matter at what hour, in receiving you; you, whom I have always seen and in all places, even sought out; I, the hermit of Passy, the lonely one of Dieppe, the recluse of Paris, where I hold myself aloof from the world, and where, nevertheless, I have ever received you as best I could, as a comrade, in the closest intimacy. Are you not sufficiently assured of my regard for you by our unbroken correspondence, irrespective of time and place, I who cannot write for my pleasure, and who have more than enough to occupy my time? If force of circumstances interrupt occasionally the interchange of our letters, and stop the scratchings of my pen, my

¹ "I might indeed fall in love with my master, if the fact of having emanated from the hands of God . . ." &c. (Letter cclxv.).

thoughts of you are none the less constant and regret expands into remorse. You are the sole friend that remains to me and I count on keeping you."¹

In the serener hours she could not be sufficiently demonstrative, nor show him enough attention, as if to efface his recollection of old difficulties. When, after a whole week passed in each other's society, living in closest union, but in all chastity, he returned to his country-seat, she wept for him as a wife torn from her husband, or she wrote to him as to a lost lover :—

"I see you again, everywhere I go, like the shadow of my spirit; now eating the Normandy sole, seated between two of my medical friends,² and not catching the conversation,³ or perhaps a guest at my princely supper-table,⁴ in my little pearl-grey room under my 'stars of gold,' the counterpart of my imperial *déjeuners* with Paul du Pays."⁵

This great affection had been put triumphantly to the test in particularly trying circumstances. It was in 1871. Severely wounded by a German bullet, Estancelin was conveyed to the Château de Baromesnil in a state of fever and collapse, which was regarded as highly critical. The news reached the Countess de Castiglione suddenly. Torn with conflicting doubts as to what she should do; hesitating between an immediate departure to his bedside, and the scruple she naturally felt as to the uncertainty of her position—a somewhat doubtful one in the view of his family—she sent for her most

¹ Letter lvi.

² Doctors, and guests of the Countess.

³ Terrible in her outspokenness, she often reminded this dear friend that his hearing was not too acute, and that this very defect, growing more pronounced with advancing years, must eventually become an afflicting deafness.

⁴ In the company of the Princess, the Dukes d'Aumale and de Chartres.

⁵ That is to say, with Paul de Cassagnac, editor of the *Pays* and a partisan of the Empire.

intimate friends in order to obtain their advice. Should she proceed forthwith to her dear old friend, risk a scene, brave all, in fact, in order to give him, for whom the Reaper with his Scythe was watching, "the first kiss of immortality, and the last one in death?"

On the other hand, was it not wiser for her merely to telegraph for news as to the condition of the wounded man, and as to what arrangements could be made to receive her? That, finally, was what she decided to do. One of her advisers—the one she had named *Balzac*, and of whom we shall shortly speak in detail—wrote out a telegram, addressed to the General, which he signed, and in which he asked if he did not desire to have near him the good services of *Coiffier*. Castiglione and Coiffier, as we know, were one and the same person. The immediate attendants of the patient feared, as an element of trouble likely to do harm, the presence of a too zealous person, who had no special claim to enter the sick-room. The reply to *Balzac* was therefore confined to two lines and to a mere expression of thanks for his kind offer. The Countess was overcome with chagrin and injured pride.

She had so little expected that her offer would be rejected; she had counted so positively on setting out on this mission as a nurse and comforter that she had assembled—eccentric to a degree in all her doings—a veritable army of assistants to act as her escort. She had gone to no end of trouble to bring all these satellites together. They were, for the most part, busy men who had consented out of pure kindness of heart to make this joint demonstration of their sympathy. These lifelong friends of the beautiful Countess,¹ to whom she had

¹ It must not be forgotten that she was at this period but thirty-one years of age.

attached the most fantastic names,¹ arrived punctually at the rendezvous. There were at least six of them, all the habitués of her dinner-table, valise in hand.

Attended by such a troop of experts, combining all the qualifications of surgical and medical, or merely consultative, skill, she felt competent to revive any dead man, "even a Norman." But the family, unaware of the peculiar qualifications of the members of this redoubtable expedition, would have none of their services. Mme. de Castiglione was cut to the quick by the rebuff of the icy despatch. The wounded man probably suffered far less from the effects of the German bullet than did the sensitive Countess from its counter-shock: it was a double thrust "to her injured pride and her public self-esteem."

Long afterwards, with that passion for news which tempts certain journalists to display such reckless professional prowess, a Parisian or local provincial sheet, it does not really matter which, announced the death of Estancelin. And as a sequel to this false news, certain reflections went the rounds among those who still recalled the name of Castiglione. "The poor Italian," it was said, "will feel it pretty badly, as the gallant soldier was for thirty years the most ardent of her admirers."² The grief of the Countess had indeed been poignant, but it was of short duration. For a late edition brought back to life the man who had never lost it.

"Can one be surprised!" she exclaimed, in that spirit of paradoxical generalisation habitual to her. "Everyone comes back to life in these days. Only the other day a Russian prince coolly walked out of his coffin

¹ La Messe, La Rosse, L'Enfant, le Grand, le Bougre, &c.

² Letter clxxxiv.

to cuff the ears of his relatives for having buried him alive." ¹

Her one fear was that she might die far away from him, all alone; and no less great was her distress at the thought that she might not be there to smooth the pillow of her friend during his last moments should he die before her. But bravely, like a woman for whom death, by merely accustoming herself to speak of it, ceases to have terrors, she discussed with him the question of her end; she insisted on predicting the circumstances that might attend her demise, and, now and then, she even evoked the melancholy moment in a manner at once playful and touching:—

“When you are seated at a table with Spanish princes and duchesses ² some one will say to you laughingly, ‘Have you seen in the newspapers that the legendary Countess has suddenly died?’ ‘Dear me!’ you will reply calmly. ‘In what paper did you read that?’ But when you are alone you will wander over to the woods, you will wipe the cold perspiration from your forehead, you will whisper ‘Courage’ to your heart, you will shed a tear, and then go home quietly and read over once again my letters.” ³

If it should be her unfortunate lot to survive him, if he should make the Great Journey before her, at least she would wish that he should not go entirely out of their double life, and that all the familiar objects which had belonged to him—those little things of daily use that are neither important nor valuable, but which are cherished as souvenirs dear to the survivors, should be religiously put aside for her. And, above all, she begged

¹ Letter clxxxiii.

² She alludes to the intimate relations between General Estancelin, the Duke de Montpensier and his family.

³ Letter clxxx.

him to do something more definite than to leave behind him a mere verbal expression of his wishes. He must sign his deposition in his own handwriting and give her a duplicate copy. Yes, that is what he must do. It would relieve her anxiety. Had she not had the too recent experience of what happened after the death of Prince Napoleon when she saw transferred to strange hands forty years of souvenirs exchanged between herself and him, his books and his letters? Besides, her demands were modest and barely exceeded the scope of a few sentimental desires. If for special family reasons, which it did not behove her to inquire into, any questions might be raised—for example, concerning the *chaîne à trèfles* of the Orleans princes—certainly no one would wish to refuse her the little and the much-longed trifles she asked for: a lock of her friend's hair, his two travelling pistols, and, most touching detail of all, his big checked, chestnut-coloured overcoat, that she had so often seen, through the Venetian blinds of the Place Vendôme, passing, coming to, or going away from the house.

It was her constant grief that there at Baromesnil, in the *entourage*, they continued to reject all her advances, as though she, Virginie Oldoini, Countess de Castiglione, were a woman of doubtful character, to be kept at a distance. She often expressed the wish that she might, at all events, preserve the esteem, the confidence, and the friendship of the General's grandson, Louis de Clercy, and that he should be made to know what she had been to his grandfather.¹

¹ Many a time she wrote to this young heir to a great name, on whose head had rested so many hopes, but whose premature death ruined the happiness of two families. She lavished on him in her letters both grave and sound advice. Or, now and then, she took a playful tone with him, questioned him as to his tastes and his pleasures; and, because he was a gentleman, and must also be a

Such were the tender and the sentimental passages figuring in her private correspondence, amid a mass of futile matter ; and at such moments she showed herself possessed of natural everyday affections, and one really felt that the woman had a heart. But her effusions were ever variable, as the thermometer of her moods rose to fever-heat or fell to zero. She was never quite free from the natural turbulence of her disposition.

Of all her thoughts, however, whether good or bad, Estancelin was the confidential recipient. He listened to the recital of her blighted hopes, the constant expression of her regrets at not having realised her unattainable dreams. He gave her the rein to talk, to write, exactly as she liked, however incoherently ; and always affectionate, though sceptical, he even listened long, with unruffled patience, to her last fad : the preparation of what was to be, but never became, the Literary Will and Testament of the Countess de Castiglione.

man of his time, she encouraged him to cultivate gallantry, foreign tongues, and, like the Duke de Chartres, practise . . . the pastime of the art of photography.

CHAPTER IX

THE MOMENT OF REVELATIONS

To while away her time—A plan to write her Memoirs; her dreams of a magnificent recompense—She begins to write—Proposals to collaborate with the heroine—Her decisions—An original correspondence in connection with this scheme, destined never to be realised—Certain confidences immediately interrupted—What she would like said, and the revelations that she absolutely forbids—The questions left unanswered—The chapter of intimacies; refusal to throw any light—On the one hand, an excess of curiosity; on the other, an excess of mystery—The project for a gallery of 500 portraits destined for the Exhibition of 1900—The bad luck attending all the enterprises of the capricious Countess—Abandonment of the plan of writing her Memoirs—Final discouragement—What became of all these papers destined to be burned.

HER "Book . . .," her "Memoirs . . .," this gloriously incomplete public revelation! She had pondered it at length: for several years the seductive idea had been playing hide-and-seek in the background of her imagination. The love of silence and obscurity which she had so consistently affected was to be only a kind of temporary condition for her. Indifference to the judgment of her fellows, in which she had clothed her soul, as in a mourning robe, she regarded as a kind of temporary veil, from which she hoped to emerge in due time more amazing and more brilliant than ever. Far from the sceptical and the envious, she would prepare, in the seclusion of her retreat, the startling surprise of what I may call her historical resurrection; and it would be like a blaze of light flaming up in an instant from the depths of darkness.

"Books," she declared, "are the portraits of the dead; newspapers are only photographs which are seen and cast aside."

She, *la sachette* of the Place Vendôme, the nocturnal Nôtre Dame of Paris, as she styled herself, had hit upon a great idea : to mould about her own moral individuality a public opinion which would be admirably noble, delicate, and entirely eulogistic ; to call upon certain friends who should be chosen after her own heart to raise a pedestal on which to establish her own pure and lasting effigy.

She would work in collaboration. Already her counsels, her notes, her reserved confidences followed each other uninterruptedly. A far-reaching scheme was on the point of realisation. She calculated in anticipation the fame and the marvellous profits that were to ensue. We know how easily she indulged her imagination, and she estimated the profits accruing from her Memoirs at hundreds of thousands of francs ; the palpable million even floated in her giddy brain.

She collected feverishly, on all sides, for copious illustration of the text, such paintings, pastels, water-colours, or statues and statuettes as glorified in the most diverse forms (but rarely to her advantage) the marvel of her physical being. She notably sought over and over again to recover from the Duke d'Aumale, who did not wish to give it up, a terra-cotta which may still be admired at Chantilly, representing her proudly draped in her royal robes as Queen of Etruria.

The idea of her illusory book became the constant theme of conversation at her own fireside and in many a Paris *salon*.

At the mere suggestion of a series of confidences of which she was to be at the same time the memorialist and the heroine, a whole hive of authors buzzed with the desire of activity. Candidates for the pleasure of sharing in the labour rose up from outside the immediate

circle of her friends. Noble amateurs, suffering from *cacoëthes scribendi*, offered their services; they were not taken seriously and remained for a long period mortally offended. Professional biographers joined the ranks, among them Imbert de Saint-Amand, who was one of the most eager. He harried the Sphinx-like recluse with his deferential but impatient zeal. If she left her door ajar never so little, he pushed it wide open, but only had to begin again at the windows the siege of the mysterious house which would not deliver up its secrets. He interrogated the Countess under the cover of would-be diplomatic letters; announced to her that he had already begun his investigations in a spirit of relentless erudition; badgered her amiably with a thousand questions, and burnt at her feet incense of the most intoxicating kind, marvelling that her head could withstand it¹

"An ideal beauty," he said in his servile language, "an exceptional being, like the Comtesse de Castiglione, would have need not of men, not of angels, not even of archangels, but of dominations and celestial thrones."²

Unfortunately, this diplomatic historian, or as she nicknamed him rather maliciously, *this author for dead women*, was neither the secretary nor the word-painter she would have chosen. Hard-pressed by him as she was, the Sphinx would not open her lips. In vain he recommenced the siege of the tower of silence in which

¹ "The Duchess (I mean her effigy) has not yet been handed over to the tender mercies of the Academicians, as my statue has been. Won't you let me have some presents and remembrances? If you should write to Uncle, tell him to send me back the statuette. The story of the Empire is to be added and I am going to dictate it to the Duke d'Aumale. Won't that be funny?" (Letter ccxliiii.)

² Fragment of a letter which I have found between the leaves of a volume formerly belonging to Mme. de Castiglione, and now the property of M. Gabriel Hanotaux.

she had immured herself. His efforts led to nothing, not even the smallest crumb of copy. Even when he managed to penetrate into the stronghold he was no better off as far as any decisive result went. He poked his head in, peering into corners, turning his inquisitive eye to right and left; his labour was thrown away, and he left annoyed that he had discovered nothing whatever, neither correspondence that had been left lying about, nor scribblings to indicate that any memoirs were in preparation; no scattered notes, not a visible shred of her past! Each time he returned more dejected. "Surely," he muttered at Timotéi's, the publisher, "surely she must have sewn up her MS. in her mattress."

The truth is that Imbert de Saint-Amand had no place reserved for him at the bedside of confidences.

One of the few elect, Léon Cléry, had a page to himself to fill up in this golden book. Diplomat, as will be remembered, for a few years in 1871, he could himself testify, with the authority of a direct eye-witness, to the precious services rendered by the secret intervention of the Florentine lady to the Government of the National Defence. Another of her favourites, Cornély, had expressed a desire that she should entrust to him a part of the MS. she had sketched out, adding that he would be only too happy if he might be permitted to disentangle the threads and weave them into a continuous narrative.

Lastly, the Chatelain of Baromesnil diligently performed his part in arranging the thousands upon thousands of vague, contradictory, and undated documents that had been placed in his hands. Every day the pile of discursive letters grew more and more portentous as the forgotten sequence of events was

little by little pieced together.¹ Willing helpers came to his rescue, endeavouring, with no little trouble, to bring order out of chaos in this interminable confusion. Again and again their eyes and brains dimmed, and they lost heart in the research. How were they to direct their steps, how pick their way through this jungle of matter, with no register of time or place, enigmatical at best, and abounding in elusive allusions and phantom souvenirs?² To tell the truth, it did not at all please Mme. de Castiglione, when a third person, however unassuming, joined in the conversation. What could that person understand about the matter when she had never known the principals? The irritable Countess was ready to fly at her as though such intervention were an annoying and impertinent intrusion.³

This little band of benedictines persevered, however, in their task, but doing only a little at a time; they kept at it with a will, but did not seem to make much progress. Mme. de Castiglione did her share of the work, collating the notes, eliminating some and inserting others, at once stimulating and embarrassing the zeal of her collaborators.

As it is always best to do one's own work, and as, said she, she had to wash the slate clean of thirty years of amorous legends; as, moreover, she was a better

¹ Parts of the work were written. What became of them? Mme. de J—, who was in the secret, wrote to Estancelin some years later: "You recollect how astonished we were at the activity of the Countess and de Cléry: so there must have been some work done."—*Correspondance privée, Archives of Baronesnil.*

² Must it be confessed that the present author would have given up his task had it not been for the assistance he received from his young son, Edric, who, interested to find a soul behind these scribblings, devoted his time to deciphering them.

³ "It is a real grief to me," she wrote to Estancelin, "that you should employ some one to do this work which she cannot understand, never having known either the Princes nor the world of the Tuileries" (Letter cccxxviii.).

judge than any one else of what it was fitting to bring to light and what to conceal, she had reserved to herself the bulk of the work in all narratives of a confidential nature in which the *amour-propre* of an author is directly involved. Why should she deny herself this privilege? Had she not all the necessary aptitudes? Frequently, good judges had extolled, rightly as she thought, the originality of her mind. Friendly lips had whispered to her that she wrote remarkably well. Under the Empire, Napoleon had read a romantic tale that she had penned and had complimented her upon it. She was no stranger to the drama. Had she not recast, after an idea of Magnard, an old comedy entitled *La Tireuse de cartes*? "And verses," she added, "are my speciality." Her thousand and one errors of style, the superabundance of epithets, which was her besetting sin (she strung together adjectives as she might have threaded pearls), and the disconnectedness of the unfinished sentences with which she encumbered her attempts at literary composition; these defects might have damped her ardour, if she herself had not been the last person to detect them. On the other hand, her neat quick phrases, her happy hits at metaphors and comparisons, the unexpected sallies which scintillated in her disordered imagination—she had a clear and lively appreciation of all these happy compensations, and they helped to justify her extraordinary self-confidence. The public would behold of what the mind and the pen of a woman of whom chroniclers spoke so slightly were capable.

While waiting for a clearer general notion in order to start work in earnest, she pushed forward the preliminary arrangement of her private archives. The

masterpiece, which it took her ten years not to write, she had planned to compose, diligently and lovingly, with the constant collaboration of her friend the Chatelain de Baromesnil, "for four-part sonatas sound better." But how many discords were destined to fill up the interludes in the scattered and often interrupted harmonies of these two spirits, who possessed more enthusiasm than dogged persistence, who were more given to sudden spurts than to real application, and who, moreover, were not always in agreement.

In the early days she dreamed that the work was already completed, and she saw it burst upon a world breathless with expectation, astonishing, glorious, justifying its authoress, and arresting attention as the consecration of a woman's life in which there had been no note of the commonplace.

But it was decreed that none of the enterprises of the Countess de Castiglione should ever arrive at completion. Nothing was to come of all this energy save a kind of phantom sketch, and hardly even that. The great beginning ended in smoke.

At the outset their excellent intention had been to revive an eclipsed glory which was sinking ever deeper into the night, and which seemed likely to disappear for ever.

The famous book was broached. They would consecrate one volume to it, two perhaps;¹ its title should be something simple, such as "The Most Beautiful

¹ Two volumes, before a third of one chapter had been written, was a big order, too big, in fact. The Countess, whatever the degree of her self-adulation, was quite aware of this when she wrote peevishly to her generous biographer in one of her fits of ill-temper:—

"What, you want to cut the book up into two parts? No one will read

Woman of the Century," for example, and this title quite suited the heroine. She found it quite equitable, not a whit excessive, so often had the fulsome compliment been dinned into her ear. From her ivory tower, if one may so call No. 14 Rue Cambon, she directed the progress of the work, drew out the plans, determined the proportions, and marked the places, herself in the centre, that the actors and the events should occupy.

Nothing should be forgotten. It was important to bring into the most prominent relief the part she had had to play in bringing about the unification of Italy, and the influence, too little recognised, that she had wielded, in agreement with Thiers, during the interruption of the siege of Paris. And they would have to make good the many wilful omissions made in defiance of the truth by the unscrupulous people who had neglected, scorned or calumniated her. Of all the many publicists and journalists who had approached her in search of copy, or in order to pry into the intimacy of her private life, or to obtain for their own profit fresh anecdotes and piquant revelations of the great actors in contemporary politics, not a single one had had the least intention of doing her justice. Of her multiple interventions in high diplomatic circles, of her secret missions and far-reaching successes, no glory had ever accrued to her name. Saint-Amand, who had besieged

the second volume. The wretched book is going to spoil everything for me. I have already quarrelled with my portraitists" (Letter cclxxv.).

In order to get her hand in she put together little articles, in the form of sketches, on "People in a Hurry," on "Postcards," on the innovations of the too practical epoch in which fate condemned her to live.

"I have just finished two articles, one about people in a hurry, the other about postcards. People who cut short the pleasantest conversations with 'I must be off!' and postcards, a diabolical invention. I detest them both alike" (Letter ccxiv.).

her, had he ever attempted to bring out into the light anything genuinely worthy of her? One of these days she would give full vent to her feelings on this subject. She would express her real opinion without equivocation or reserve. Her dissatisfaction would not submit to any restriction when she came to settle her score with the biographer of the Duke d'Aumale, who had been so enthusiastic in portraying his hero full face and in profile, but had forgotten, from one end of his panegyric to the other, to say a word of what she had done, her agitations, her solicitations, her schemes to make a leader and a conqueror of this vacillating spirit. She would not stop here in the course of her personal executions. The public should learn to treat according to their deserts the "amorous tales of a Pierre de Lano," and of all those who could find nothing better to do, in order to amuse themselves at her expense, than to pick up the crumbs dropped from the table of a Viel-Castel. At this point she waxed wroth in anticipation. She tackled her victims one by one, mentioning them by name. For instance, her blood boiled at the very thought of a certain authoress who accused her of having thrown her shoes out of the window during a family dispute. What was this alleged misdemeanour compared with the effrontery with which "this woman" (we quote the words of Mme. de Castiglione) had thrown her nightcap over the Imperial roof.

As for General Fleury, a witness who had been placed too high up really to see, but who, nevertheless, had doubtless seen too much, she would know how to find the right moment, the opportunity and the place to settle an old score with his shadow.

In general, when the whole truth ought to have been spoken, a general conspiracy of silence had been

organised against her, and when nothing should have been said, a conspiracy of slander. She, in her turn, would leave no one out in satisfying her legitimate rancour.

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Life was not extinct yet in those centres where her appreciations and her recollections were to be circulated. Survivors of the Empire still stood in her way. Although she was not in the habit of mincing matters, either in politics or in love, she did not feel herself quite at liberty to talk, as she would have liked, about the Princess Mathilde, or of the ex-Empress Eugénie. "I wish they were dead," she said simply. The Orleans family also caused her some embarrassment, the Duke de Chartres especially, whose constant affection would have to be dealt with cautiously. It would cost her something, she acknowledged, not to divulge the services she had rendered him in intervening with the Emperor—services of which she still retained "startling proofs." But if it was absolutely necessary she would pass over this delicate question; it could be kept in the background for the time being. It would only leave all the more space for developing the main thread of the narrative: the participation of Mme. de Castiglione in the events of 1858, 1871, 1873, and 1876. The legend that represented her as a frivolous toy, almost a courtesan, a modern favourite, had lasted long enough. Now or never she must commit to the rubbish-heap of idle gossip the stories so long in circulation, which tended to depict her hermitage at Passy as a sort of "amorous *Ceil-de-Bœuf*."

With regard to herself she was extremely reticent, and she recommended her collaborateur to imitate her

in this. Again and again she said to the Norman: "Above all, correct this, cross that out. *You* must not start telling anecdotes . . . you too!" But the Norman was sceptical. He was not, and never was to be, persuaded to follow her to the incredible lengths to which she hoped to lead him, submissive and convinced: the amorous disinterestedness of the Emperor, the complete abnegation of any idea of pleasure in his political commerce with Mme. de Castiglione, the Scipionic virtue of this polygamous Jupiter, whose voluptuous pastimes would provide material for a very long recital indeed! After numerous and futile endeavours to get to the bottom of the mystery (which in reality was no mystery whatever), he was forced to admit that between the asseverations of the alcovists and the denials of the Countess, he could never arrive at the absolute truth. As he could not establish any right to make a serious retrospective inquiry in the cause, he was obliged to take the wise decision, whether he liked it or not, of no longer losing his time to get to the bottom of a riddle to which love had not given him the key. As this reasonable man expressed himself to the author, "When it is a question of a woman, it is only a fool who says, 'I swear it.'"¹

However, the provision of a certain amount of positive facts seemed to him indispensable. Their aspiration was to construct together a kind of model of "living history." What would be its merits if it

¹ He was truly Pyrrhonic in another similar case. One of his lady friends said jokingly to this Nimrod one evening, when the conversation turned on the eternal forbidden fruit:

"What ground is best guarded and closest watched?"

"The Matrimonial."

"What is the ground most poached upon?"

"Again, the Matrimonial!"

lacked, at all events, the elements of accuracy? And how offer any proofs if the heroine of the book was constantly evasive and refused to answer a direct question? Alas! his arguments were so much wasted breath. Instead of complimentary notes, she sent her correspondent peevish complaints. He was really too inquisitive.

She was asked for genuine documents, authentic evidence, arranged in order! Did they take her for an archivist! Why was she not asked for secret portfolios? How did they imagine she had been able to preserve her thousands of autograph letters, photographs, certificates, and the rest through forty years of a wandering existence?

"You are asking too much of me; I shall get rid of all my papers."

"You are really driving me to that with your doubts and refutations."

It was no joke working for her and with her!

The fact was she was not prepared to follow him in the matter of detailed explanations. Even to skim the surface of certain subjects that were too full of equivocal suggestions, even to touch lightly upon them, was enough to infuriate her. She had laid down the law: only those parts must be insisted upon which beyond all doubt redounded to her honour. But he had not the temerity to stick to his point. Impatiently, she sought to stir up the dying enthusiasm of her old friend. He, however, not considering himself sufficiently informed, threw down his pen and took to other pursuits. He was too much devoted to the passion of hunting to please the Countess, and too little to the more sedate occupations of the study, where she would have liked to shut him up in a permanent *tête-à-tête* with the image

of the absent one. What an empty pleasure hunting was, and for a man of his age how risky! And to support her statement she quoted the case of the Marquis Oldorni, her father, who died at Spezia of a chill caught while out shooting partridges. The "Norman" heard all she said, although he had so often been reproached with deafness, and went on strolling through his woods, gun in hand, in search of game.

Numerous and pressing invitations at length brought him back to the work again. He allowed himself to be convinced, put aside his fowling-piece and set in motion the pen that had been once again thrust between his fingers. The excellence of his intentions and of his frame of mind were unquestionable. However, what he wrote never proved satisfactory in its original form. A perfect hail of advice, criticisms, and corrections came back by return of post: everything had to be started again, and the chapter was no further forward than before.

Estancelin was independence personified. We have remarked that no one was ever more restive under the dictates of another will, but his pace was checked at every moment.

When engaged on the Italian question, if he was about to start the chapter on the Orsini bombs, which was so essential to the subject, she would cry, "Not a word about that! It would make me seem an accomplice of this would-be assassin of an emperor and a people."

If, following the current rumour, he thought himself authorised to touch delicately upon the intimacy between the beautiful Countess and the Master of the Tuileries, she curtly enjoined him to drop the curtain without delay. What did he imagine he was doing in painting

the Emperor in such unflattering colours, in representing a Napoleon going to Solferino scourged by the fear of conspiracies and abased by a venal love? How much better and nobler would be the aspect of things presented in a different light! Napoleon would be depicted, not seduced by the dazzling beauty of a woman, but led on to victory by the persuasive force of this woman, by the ardour of her language, carried away by her passionate love for oppressed Italy and for France, her liberator.

And above all, let there be no further mention of the ridiculous and contemptible story hawked to all-comers, that of an attempt to murder the Emperor at her house at Passy, the invention of the Corsican spy, Griscelli, that cut-throat, that madman! Too often it had been insinuated that she herself had provided the dagger. It must in future be supposed, rightly or wrongly, that Napoleon was not on his way to call upon Mme. de Castiglione; that he had an engagement elsewhere; that he went frequently of a morning, escorted by police, to the house of la Bellanger; that it was, in fact, thither that the Empress went to claim her husband in exchange for a ransom; lastly, that if it was true that a certain great lady had had certain *faiblesses*, it was necessary to make distinctions, and not to confound her with *une autre ambassadrice*, an Italian also, whose favours were not unknown at Court.

If, seriously desirous of adorning, of embellishing, the lady whose charming likeness he hoped to transmit to posterity, he wished to catalogue the number and the beauty of her jewels, or thought of describing her trans-Alpine châteaux (those dream-palaces, in whose existence he had taken a long time to believe), she quickly turned him on to another path. What business had people to

concern themselves with her worldly wealth, with her means of subsistence?

If it did not displease her to have it published abroad that she wrote ravishingly,¹ if she dearly wished it to be put into flattering evidence that she was the object of the special favour of the Roman Court, that her relations in England, in Germany, and in France were extensive and varied, that her relations with Amédée had been particularly interesting, for it was she who had facilitated his accession to the throne of Spain, she was, on the other hand, anxious that her family origin and kindred matters should not be too insistently dwelt upon.² In her extreme fear of public opinion, she raised up barriers whenever her historiographer sought to take a step in advance. . . . It was not easy to make much progress with so many barred passages, forbidden subjects, and conditional restrictions.

Details of her comings and goings in high princely and diplomatic circles, Court narratives flattering to her *amour-propre*, her continental travel in high and noble company: these were the typical pictures to which she gave her high approval. At Baden, had she not been the intimate friend of Augusta, *une autre politicienne*, whose ambitious career was to be cut short by the Imperial German autocracy? At Munich, had she not been the daily guest of the cousins of Napoleon III., the daughters of the Grand Duchess Stéphanie? It would be necessary to go into all the circumstances of these episodes, and, if need be, to dwell upon them in detail.

Further, complete liberty was granted to publish in

¹ A playful eulogium of the Duke d'Aumale, which she had accepted as a just tribute to the reality of her gift.

² "It is indiscreet to accuse one's mother" (Letter cli.).

full a certain set of souvenirs, the contemplation of which enchanted her memory; namely, her triumphant appearances at the Tuileries, and the infinite consideration of which she was the object on the part of its master, as well as on the part of the high officials—de Morny, Walewski, Rouher, Fould, Chasseloup-Laubat, Bourqueney, La Tour d'Auvergne, Baroche, Thouvenel, and the Rothschilds. Each of these powerful personages had lavished upon her every consideration and multiple invitations. But *she did not put herself out, except for the Tuileries*, she said twenty years later, with more pride than accuracy.

Such, more or less, was the *ensemble* of Mme. de Castiglione's instructions as to the possible limits of her literary *apologia*. In spite of all these minute recommendations the work advanced but little. Its progress was hardly perceptible. Whether the direction and prescriptions of the Countess failed to be carried out according to her expectation, or whether she was too difficult to serve, they were still at the starting-point, or not very far from it. The portrait which had been so magnificently sketched out never took form. The precious metal was not separated from its matrix.

Symptoms of mutual irritation began to betray themselves in the letters that passed between them. Difficulties were prematurely raised as to the possible size of the pages, as to the division of non-existent chapters, all of which led to futile discussions. The collaborator and confidant whom she had fettered by her reticences demanded a number of autograph letters which he urged were useful as documentary proofs, but which she regarded as compromising. She never could be induced to give up these significant documents,

all of which she had carefully kept and carried about with her during the wander-years of her nomadic life. Fresh quarrels ensued.

"I don't want to get myself assassinated through your historical literature," she wrote to the very man she had commissioned to produce that "literature."

He took umbrage and protested that it was impossible for him to take any further steps forward if he was to be denied the necessary clue to the pages—a clue which perhaps did not exist at all. She turned purple with rage. What, he dared to express doubts as to their authenticity! She threatened to destroy the whole lot of this waste-paper. The book, as he conceived it, did not justify its existence; she found it out of date, futile, commonplace, and in bad taste: why not throw it into the fire at once?¹ Moreover, why this persecuting, persistent cross-examination of her, with regard to the most intimate secrets of her life! Was she obliged to give an account to every one as to the origin of her fortune and of her domestic arrangements? It would be sufficient to establish once for all that her past was a fleckless mirror, a limpid stream, a crystal spring.² Being a resourceful woman,

¹ "It is amazing that a head like yours persists in such blunders. Stop, you fool! It would be worse than a calamity, it would be the end of everything. *C'est se f . . . du monde*, to try to victimise in this way a poor sufferer, too old to retaliate . . ." (Letter cclvi.).

² "All these details emanating from odious calumniators: these indecent costumes flaunted in public, this fashionable life which I have never led [?] either in my out of the world and solitary Passy, then almost a desert, or in the poor little house at Dieppe! Do not give me any more of your false appreciations as to the virtue or otherwise of young married women, which, in any case, would not have applied to me since I was a widow. But I will never suffer any one whatever, friend or enemy, to meddle with my private affairs, of which I have always taken the full responsibility [she had forgotten the allowances and the gifts], in the midst of my cares, worries, and privations, having a husband to support at Court [she had ruined him], and a son in town or in the country, without a shadow of intimate or clandestine resource" (Letter cclvii.).

she had been able to draw all that was needed for her heavy expenses, and more, from the lawful price of her diplomatic interventions, and from the pension granted to her as the daughter and the widow of former ambassadors. If need be, she would furnish proofs of her statements, the rash Countess: never had she been dependent on the gifts either of emperor, or duke, or husband, or son,¹ or even of a lover.

Mme. de Castiglione, evidently, took some liberties with the truth. These absolute repudiations and affirmations fell upon deaf ears. So many rich presents, the number of which was well known, the necklaces with the alternating rows of white and black pearls, the cascades of diamonds, emeralds, and topazes, the bracelets by the dozen—what! had a mysterious fairy materialised all these beautiful things with a touch of her wand?

"I don't know everything, therefore I know nothing," replied the Norman with his steady logic.

Moody and capricious as she had become, the Countess had the feeling that she was falling headlong from the highest pinnacle of her enthusiasms. Decidedly nothing could be done. The project whose promise had caressed one of her last hours of illusion was no longer to be thought of. She was mistrusted, she was not understood, she would never be understood. She had demanded previously that a trunk filled with documents should be sent on to him. Everything must be sent back to her now without exception: autograph documents, letters, and portraits. They were to be committed to the flames. Hitherto, she had refused to destroy, or allow to pass into any other hands, her scribblings, black, green, or red, on the plea that they

¹ "My alleged family fortune. . . . People who have ruined me!" (Letter cclvii.).

might be useful in supplying forgotten dates or lapses of memory. But the die was cast: since it had not been possible during her lifetime to animate them with an immortal flame, she preferred to see them reduced to ashes, rather than let them be exposed after her death¹ to the curiosity of jealous and furtively hostile families, or to the mercy of dealers in forgeries and grubbers up of private scandals.

She was disappointed to the core to see these beautiful dreams of literary glory vanish into thin air—dreams to which she had given birth in the height of fever, which she had not the strength to sustain, and she could not conceal her disgust; again and again, when the thought of this collapse came into her mind, her mordant words and cutting notes betrayed all her bitterness. The man whose ambition it had been to be her biographer, but who was fated to be only the most constant of her friends, had conceived the idea of inserting a "Life of Mme. de Castiglione," by way of compensation, in the scheme of his own Memoirs which had been too long delayed. While a devoted friend of his, fanatical in her admiration, constantly encouraged him to do this, the Countess de Castiglione, nourishing the fixed idea of her own deep disappointment, only thought of mocking at him, and she dropped him, in the course of her correspondence, such affabilities as this: "Abandon these Memoirs you are writing at the instigation of this modern Helen of Troy—you will be obliged to sell your copy gratis."

¹ "I am sure I shall leave this ugly world before you. Do not mourn for me! For it will be a deliverance. In this case, please bequeath my writings and souvenirs to the Colonel, and after him to the flames: they are of no interest to any one" (Letter ccxx.). How far she was from her first enthusiasm, from the limitless hopes built on the absorbing interest of this story of a woman.

Estancelin wrote his chapter and contented himself with that. The magic book, of which she was to have been the glorified heroine, never went beyond its obscure preliminaries. The engravings and pictures which had been brought together were used, neither for the illustration of this work, which was barely a pamphlet, nor for the proposed exhibition of 500 portraits of *La plus belle femme du Siècle*, for we had almost forgotten this detail: this marvellous "section," this unique gallery, was to be opened in 1900 in one of the pavilions of the immense international fête held in the Champs de Mars. Who does not recollect it? This universal concourse of every form of industry, art, and commerce, was in its conception solely a pretext for a colossal exhibition of the strangest and rarest spectacles that can bewitch the eye or captivate the senses. The series of 500 portraits of the divine Castiglione would have been one of these "features," one of these attractions, and not the least. Alas! paintings, pencil-drawings, pastels, were to be irrevocably dispersed. She had promised herself the gratification of being present in modest mourning among the crowd at this apotheosis of the pinks, the old golds, and the violets. She would have lived over again her experiences as she witnessed the admiration which surrounded her portrait at the Exhibition of 1867; and that would have been some reparation for the long neglect of the modern world. But all these dreams were destined to remain unfulfilled.

Mme. de Castiglione had only been nourishing in her ardent soul futile dreams, the unique fruit of which was to help her to await her death.

Whither vanished this wealth of beautiful faces, this mass of notes, containing the record of her happy and

her melancholy days? Almost everything (if not the paintings and drawings, at least the written matter) was destined to perish inexorably in the flames of several *autodafés*. The letters would have had a similar fate if pious hands had not preserved them, although their author had demanded their destruction. It was fated, on the other hand, that the greater part of them should finally be handed down to us, and that from them should ultimately be extracted certain pages of positive fact, which Mme. de Castiglione herself, with her taste for mystery and for re-arranged history, would never have made known.

But for some time past she had had other things to worry about. She was threatened with the dispersion of the remaining remnants of her fortune. Her farms and her Italian villas resisted only with difficulty the vicissitudes of a long and ruinous series of lawsuits. And at the same time her worries in her own house in Paris had become greatly aggravated.

CHAPTER X

THE MELANCHOLY END

Complications of another sort—Her accounts—Financial confusion—The palaces, châteaux, villas, and property in land belonging to the Countess de Verasis-Castiglione—An estimate of the value of this property—Reality and imagination—Rich, yet poor—Appeal for funds—Mme. de Castiglione and the Rothschilds—The details of a visit to the great baron—In an inferior house; some loans raised at the universal uncle's—The Countess's jewels—Her pensions from Italy and her misgivings as to their reliability—Difficulties in the household and domestic worries—Unexpected characteristics—The mortifications undergone at No. 14 Rue Cambon—The Countess's strange disputes with her landlord—Nights at the Café Voisin—Away from home; continuation of her nocturnal walks—Mme. de Castiglione's last eccentricities—The final gloom—Weariness of soul and bodily infirmity—Sudden aggravation of the disease that ended her life—With what distressing detail she had made all the preparations for her departure—She vanishes in the shade and silence of a blighted career.

HER affairs were in as bad a state as her brain. The money required for her daily expenses was disappearing piece by piece from lockers that were being rapidly drained dry. She is constantly complaining in her letters of her financial worries: the sudden upsetting of her calculations; difficulties in collecting or discharging debts; the curtailment of dividends due to attachments on her property; or endless other accidents and losses. What were her friends thinking of to leave her thus helpless and bewildered, to struggle on alone through such a chaos? Why did they not hasten to her aid before the shipwreck? Yet they all remembered her, and offered her their services, their disinterested support, their safe counsels, eager to tranquillise her mind and to clear up this confusion. The simple truth was,

she would never listen to them—with the exception, possibly, of Cléry, who rendered her inestimable services in disentangling her affairs in litigation.

Her accounts from now on, in fact, are in an incredible disorder. The situation was singularly ambiguous, even absurd. Rich in landed property and in pensions, yet living almost from hand to mouth, the possessor of caskets filled with jewels, but at the same time not always sure of her meals; the owner of several palaces and villas, but having no fixed abode, no real dwelling-place which she could positively call her own in the Paris of her adoption. Any conscientious effort to form an estimate of her constantly shifting fortune is frustrated, owing to her persistent refusal ever to expatiate on her resources. These resources had varied with the years, being sometimes abundant and at others singularly reduced; but they were never completely exhausted.

While she continually deplored the fact that she was confined to such narrow lodgings, both at the Place Vendôme and the Rue Cambon, as well as at the Café Voisin, there was in reality nothing to hinder her from living pleasantly and comfortably in her Oldoini palace,¹ on her mountain of Spezia. Once, during the dark days, she had been obliged to sell the family place, but she had arranged later on to buy it back. She had so deep a feeling for the past that she would have suffered a thousand deaths sooner than give up a particle of what had once intimately belonged to her, or been even a shred in the lives of the members of her lineage.

¹ "Between France and Italy I no longer know how to choose: between the palaces, villas, cottages, and fields that have been mine from my birth, and this hole here which has a fatal attraction for me. Why do I hesitate? Undoubtedly, my old house at Passy was my securest dwelling-place. Perhaps it is there that I shall end my days, alone, just as formerly I lived there, unknown" (Letter lxi.).

The Palazzo Bonaparte, where she had grown up as a girl under the guardianship of her grandfather Lamporecchi, the Italian Berryer, was still in her possession ; and her letters enumerate, in glowing terms, a whole string of villas which, she alleged, belonged to her at Lucca, Pisa, and Pietrasanta.¹

“ Ah, my palaces ! You ought to be mine ! And you, who knew me so well, did you not feel from my silence how I was always thinking of them, whether I was on the shores of the Channel or of the Mediterranean ? ”²

By her marriage she had become lady-paramount of the castle of the Castigliones, and she fancied also that thereby she was *suzeraine* of the monastic manor of the Stupinigi, where the pious Clotilde of Savoy ended her days. Then, as her imagination was never at rest, we hear of a house said to have been built for her in Corsica, at Ajaccio. The statement is doubtful, but she, at least, swore to the fact.³ At all events, this would seem to make a good many palaces for one and the same person ! To the list might be added, moreover, the villa of Isola Bella, which was part of her marriage portion, a property particularly dear to her heart. Even though the place had been sadly neglected, even though this Borromeoan villa had almost become a

¹ “ I ought never to have left the palace Oldoini, nor especially my grandfather's palazzo Bonaparte, with his villas Borghese, Lucca, Pisa, Pietrasanta ; nor yet ought I to have lowered the drawbridge of the castle of Castiglione e Castiglione (the Palace of Turin) ; nor that of the monastic castle of Stupinigi, where Clotilde of Savoy, who was canonised, lived and died ” (Letter ccxlv.).

² Letter lxiv.

³ I was told by the grand-niece of Marshal Sébastiani, the wife of a former prefect of the Republic, Mme. Filippini-Sébastieni, that the Countess imagined this, and that she had no doubt persuaded herself of the existence of this château in Corsica, because there was a Bonaparte mansion there for the Emperor and Empress, because her friend Bacciochi had his there also, and because, in going from one to the other, she thought herself at home in the island.

kind of wretched Indian hovel, she consented to part with it only at the last extremity.

But her principal estate, the one she cultivated, was her mountain of Spezia : the famous mountain which was such a constant worry to her and which she defended with such fine and unremitting energy¹ against the grasping manœuvres of her creditors and the encroachments of the military authorities, even against her Government, until one fatal day when the king's carabineers finally appeared on the territory in dispute and left no room for further discussion. What a fine and heroic moment of her past when, like a sovereign on a holiday, she reigned supreme over the extensive slopes of her glorious hill,² surrounded by her retainers, her farmers and vassals, and commanding from her eyry a far view extending to her estates of Carabas ! An ancient and picturesque Capuchin monastery rose above them : a fortified convent, really provided with four historic cannon, and guarded in the absence of the abbess—the Countess de Castiglione herself—by an old woman spinning flax.

Unfortunately, her mountain was sorely tried. Within a few years all the scourges of creation seemed to have descended upon it. War, plague, and fire : it was spared nothing, not even the invasion of the bailiffs. At one time the smallpox killed off some fifty of its peasants ; at another, the levies made for military purposes left there to till the soil only a few old men, women, and children crying for food. The oldest

¹ " I have taken up again my suit for dispossession, with royal protection and with Crispi for my lawyer " (Letter clxxiv.).

² *In* grandeur and *for* grandeur was I born: Had you but seen with your own eyes those palaces which no doubt you imagine were founded on the clouds, and my villas and my lands with vassals kneeling and doing homage ! " (Letter dlxi.).

inhabitant, aged one hundred and ten years, had declared that never in the memory of man, even counting the pestilence and the cholera, had there been such an accumulation of dead.

The battle which the Countess had to wage against the hungry Shylocks, whom she had to appease, was long, savage, and unrelenting. Her creditors left her no time to breathe. Notwithstanding the allowances from her king and Rothschild's intermittent aid, notwithstanding the delays¹ which were extorted with difficulty, or spontaneously obtained, through the fervent and devoted intervention of strangers, the mountain was always on the point of crumbling away and of being completely swallowed up. Only the most powerful protection could avail to re-establish its tottering foundations and to save the domain from irretrievable ruin.² Meanwhile, in the course of the long campaign, considerable portions of her inheritance had passed over into the enemy's hands. One day the house which she called her cradle—although she affected not to have been born there—was put up at auction. Another time it was the turn of her furniture and the family plate,³ and even of her bridal bed of purple and gold—objects that she had kept there as precious relics.

¹ "Through Rothschild and Savoy (King Humbert) I have obtained a two months' respite for the sale by auction. By this the executors lose ninety per cent.!" (Letter ccvii.).

² "I have received a mysterious letter in a large and unknown hand from a little girl. It bears a false address. She has devoted herself to me of her own accord, all unknown to her parents and the lawyers; unknown even to the sheriffs, who were to sell to-day my poor old family furniture. She said to herself: 'God and my father's spirit helping me, I am going to find a way out that is less wretched, . . . for Nina was present at my birth.' And even these old judicial skinflints have succumbed to this child and granted a delay" (Letter ccxxii.).

³ "To-morrow they will sell at auction the silver plate at Spezia. The Seine is all that is left me" (Letter ccxxii.).

To redeem a situation, already so seriously compromised, she would have had to wipe out, at one stroke, her personal debts and those of her reckless parents. But in order to accomplish this, she lacked a round sum amounting to several hundreds of thousands of francs. She returned to the bank in the Rue Laffitte, offering her great friend Alphonse the chance of buying her entire possessions, she to keep only the usufruct of them for life.¹ The king of finance listened in an absent-minded way to her proposals, without entering into them. She returned a second time with a revised version of her scheme that appeared to her exceedingly alluring. But still this master calculator failed to be seduced by her dazzling propositions. He adopted a paternal air, admitted that the affair was a good one, very good, but added that he did not care to burden himself with it. As she started to leave, depressed and crestfallen, he sought to soothe her trouble by a visible and immediate compensation, and he said to her: "Here, my dear Countess, accept these bits of paper (ten thousand francs); go and rest and take care of yourself; and don't let us talk any more of this." Even in the face of these blue "bits of paper," however, Mme. de Castiglione's face still remained glum, and the banker, in jest, feigned to restore the tempting bank-notes to their place. He then instantly handed them to her again; but alas! she incautiously persevered in her proudly disdainful attitude, declaring that she "wouldn't take them for anything in the world." "Tear them up," she cried, with a fine dramatic gesture. "No indeed, no indeed," the Baron answered, and thereupon he carefully

¹ "I should need but two hundred thousand francs, and in this connection have written to our poor King of the Exchange to buy money down and leave me the usufruct" (Letter ccliv.).

slipped the money into a drawer, while in his visitor's ears resounded the cruel snapping of a lock of which she had abandoned the "open sesame."

At her wit's end now as to the way out of her difficulties, she had had an insane desire to sell the entire property, even at a serious loss, so as to obtain, at this famine price, at least some peace of mind. With this object in view, she several times made the journey to Italy. But as she travelled like a queen, and whenever she had money drew it like water, her travelling expenses could scarcely be inscribed on her list of economies. Quantities of telegrams overtook her on the way; offers from Pisa, Florence, and Turin, fixing a sum total.¹ Her idea was to make an arrangement permitting her to enter into possession of the money, without really losing possession of her mountain; so, the upshot was that none of the contemplated plans turned out to be feasible, and she could never make up her mind. Offers ceased, and things remained as before. Tired of waiting, the would-be buyers withdrew their proposals. In the end, all that Mme. de Castiglione had left were the revenues from her neglected fields, the doubtful rents of her "uninhabitable villas" and badly managed farms—the income, in a word, from a property honeycombed with mortgages, a meagre pittance, in fact. On every hand there were liabilities, disbursements, securities that paid no interest, and in addition to all these, the closing in about her of the inextricable jungle of the law. She had learned to her sorrow that the profits of her mountain amounted to almost nothing, and that to expect to draw from it a regular income was out

¹ "And that is why," she ended, in telling me the incident, "I haven't the fifty *Louis* needed for the writing-machine (she had always wished to have a typewriter) and not a farthing for Spezia."

of the question. The property hardly sufficed to enable her to vegetate in a condition just short of positive destitution, and to pass away in peace.

Her Spezia property brought her in just enough to cover her necessary expenses, or only just a little more. If a little current coin found its way into her hands, it had to be diverted at once for the support of her father's second wife (who was living in Portugal), or for the liquidation of other dues, which in no way improved her situation.

Her motives, thus, for keeping hold of her estates were less pecuniary than sentimental. Ever since her childhood her imagination had been haunted by memories of "her family palaces." It flattered her vanity and suited her romantic humour to retain the graceful titles of *châtelaine* and abbess, and to fancy herself in a position to reserve for distinguished guests, at any hour, the full hospitality of her Italian domains. Thus, in 1886, for example, she had unstintingly laid herself out in civilities of that kind. During that year many distinguished personages visited the Peninsula: the Empress Eugénie was there, wandering disconsolate, beneath the beautiful Italian sky, hesitating as to the choice of a sojourn from fear of embarrassing encounters; Don Carlos was resting in Venice after his unsuccessful enterprises; the Napoleons without a country went and came in Florence; and meanwhile the heirs of the House of Savoy were ruling in Rome. The Empress decided that only at Pisa could she live a calm and sheltered life. The Countess de Castiglione invited her to honour the Oldoini palace with her presence, but the courteous offer was declined. On the other hand, King Humbert announced that he would knock at the door of the convent at Spezia, of which she was the

abbess.¹ Prince Napoleon had readily accepted her offer to occupy one of her villas with his family. The Duke de Chartres had promised to look in upon her. The Duke d'Aumale was to abandon his Zucco vineyards for her mountain, on the most hurried of visits, for Queen Victoria was shortly expected in Sicily. In fact, some of the most distinguished personages in Europe seemed to have given each other rendezvous in Italy; especially the unlucky pretenders—which made Cléry say that he had made up his mind not to miss this exhibition of banished princes.

To return to her claims of the possession of a considerable fortune, what I have said sufficiently indicates that they certainly could not be based on the value of her Italian property, three-fourths of which had been consumed by usurers.² Less delusive confirmation of her pretensions is to be found in the items of certain legacies that she had inherited; in the amount standing to her credit in a certain great banking-house; in the item also of her pensions, and in her marvellous collection of jewels.

At the most acute stage of her financial embarrassment the Alboni inheritance had come to her, and no windfall was ever more seasonable. With a kind of cruel and artless frankness she expressed her regret

¹ "At the end of this month my king, feeble and faltering, accompanied by my queen, will be obliged to come to my mountain. I shall be there to receive them at my house; for these hotels are only good for kings in exile" (Letter cxcii.).

² "I derive nothing from my property of Spezia. It all goes in taxes, upkeep, and interest, without counting the numerous debts of the Marquis and Marquise (Oldoini) that have to be paid; then, too, the support of the second Portuguese wife and of five Spezians" (Letter cccxvii.).

that she had not received it fifteen years before. In the first place, her father could then have enjoyed his share of it; and thus finding himself once more afloat, he would not have felt the need of marrying a second time; moreover, Mme. de Castiglione would thus have been spared the subsequent burden of supporting the "second Portuguese wife" and a new family.

After all, this heritage, though not to be despised, was nothing compared to that of which—according to her version—she had been defrauded; namely, a large share of the fortune of her exceedingly rich cousin, the Duchess of Galliera. Professor Ferrari, the Duchess's son and natural heir, as is well known, had declined in advance four-fifths of this great inheritance, and the Countess bitterly complained because the waves of this Pactolus had not flowed towards the Place Vendôme, instead of being wasted in every other direction, and especially in watering the already sufficiently fertile fields of the Count de Paris. But had she in reality any just title to the reversion of this property? On the contrary, had she not done everything to prevent so rare a piece of luck coming to her even in her dreams? Her exalted kinswoman had accumulated a number of grievances against her which were not likely to inspire any posthumous generosity. She had never forgiven Mme. de Castiglione for not granting her wish to enter into possession of the Countess's property of Valdevara, which, moreover, the Countess eventually beheld wrested from her for the construction of a hospital bearing the Duchess's name. Also, she had made it a point of honour to advertise openly her contempt for the source of her cousin's wealth, which was entirely the result of her husband's speculations; and she had even gone so far in the manifestation of her reprobation, as more

than once to rise and to leave this or that drawing-room when the Duchess was announced.¹

And were these the only grounds for their hostile relations? At any rate, it is not to be denied that she paid dearly for her disdain and haughtiness.² Later on, when sunk in relatively commonplace circumstances, she contrasted what was with what might have been, and she could hardly fail to regret that in her pride and heedlessness she had deliberately thrown eight millions out of the window.

But the golden torrent had not yet absolutely run dry. Her jewels had not yet been sold, and were intact, or nearly so. Mme. de Castiglione's jewels! Their inventory was prodigious, and all Paris must have thrilled with curiosity on the great day of their dispersal.³ They were of very great value, since, at divers times, she had been able to borrow from one hundred to two hundred thousand francs on merely a part of the collection. And

¹ "You will certify to the inheritances lost to me, which she has scattered among her toadies. They might easily return to me what they have robbed me of. During twenty years I never once made her a curtsy, and though I saw her every evening at Boulogne [the Rothschild place], yet I never greeted her. . . . When she arrived I rose and took a walk in the park; then, after she had gone, I came back. I never consented to dine with her. The old barons [Gustave, Edmond, Alphonse de Rothschild] found fault with me, saying: 'We shall never be able to give you as much as this old Duchess can'" (Letter clxiv).

² This superabundant wealth, the greater part of which had been rejected by the natural heir, for moral reasons that I am not called upon to fathom, went to charitable institutions; to the princes of the House of Orléans, collectively, in the person of the Count de Paris; to museums; and for other purposes still, until, after the Duchess de Galliera's death, it was entirely distributed.

³ The title of the general catalogue offered to amateurs was as follows: "Catalogue of very fine jewels: Remarkable necklace of five rows of pearls, unset pearls, *parures*, bracelets, brooches, ear-rings, rings, pins set with brilliants and coloured stones; fancy jewellery; silver-ware, fans, bric-à-brac, laces, books, souvenirs of the Second Empire, pictures, portraits, furniture, objects of art. In consequence of the decease of Mme. la Comtesse de Castiglione, the sale will take place at the Hôtel Drouot, Hall No. 1, on Wed., Thurs., Fri., and Sat., the 26th, 27th, 28th, and 29th of June 1901, at 2 o'clock."

at the 1901 sale the famous pearl necklace brought nearly half-a-million.¹

For her pearls—white, black, and rose—she cherished a sort of amorous tenderness, almost fancying that they loved her. Her pearls, her diamonds, and her emeralds were, at any rate, her capital, and a capital which, while unproductive, was safe. She drew her income from the royal privy purse of Italy. This occasionally belated sum was often eked out by substantial stipends from other sources; “loans,” or graceful attentions in the guise of pin-money—pins gilded by the hand of a Duke d’Aumale or of an Alphonse de Rothschild. “The Duke is on the best of terms with me,” she confided to her old friend at Baromesnil; “he would give me anything I might ask.” And further on she makes this decisive reflection concerning what she might expect from him, were she always equally sure of his willingness. “If the Duke were a Prince Charming, I should ask him, perhaps when he marries, to consent to a simple loan, with all due guarantees; it would be an excellent investment. But it is only the poor and humble who help and take care of you. To appeal to the heart of princes is like scratching a stone with cotton.”

As for the mighty genii of treasures, occupying the three or four buildings of the Rue Laffitte which formed their bank; as for the three Rothschild brothers, they had not forgotten the services rendered under the Empire by the radiant young Countess de Verasis-Castiglione. No loan, French or foreign, no affair in which money had a voice, could then be concluded without their having a hand in it. Cavour’s friend, always one of the first to be informed of coming events, had several times, in the course of her semi-official embassy,

¹ It was composed of 279 pearls, weighing all together 3838 grains.

supplied them with valuable hints as to the condition of Italian finances; more than once she had given them, just at the right moment, positive and secret information susceptible of influencing the market, and of creating the elements of very fruitful manipulations.¹ Baron Alphonse,² the eldest of the family and the head of this financial *triplice*, was anxious to show his appreciation for the Countess's valuable services, and long before had offered to organise for her a source of revenue in the shape of a large sum to be given her once for all. But, distrustful of herself, and fearing her inclination to lavish expenditure, she had preferred that he should give her a fixed yearly income. She would have been well advised to accept, by the same token, the additional gift of a house in Paris which he one day proposed to her. Every one, in her place, would have yielded to so tempting an offer, which was not repeated a second time. The improvident creature, incessantly harassed by the consequences of her extravagance, had thus missed the opportunity of living under her own roof, of being mistress for all time of her own house—and it was an opportunity that never occurred again.

The Countess lived in a chronic state of anxiety regarding the duration and regularity of the pension which she received from the Italian Government as the widow of an aide-de-camp of the king, and in a way her

¹ Note also the services which she rendered in the affairs of Egypt, and the combinations which were the result thereof, and the three hundred thousand francs from the Viceroy that were due her: "The statue of De Lesseps alone knows it all," she said somewhere (Letter ccvii.).

² Formerly the Countess had had every reason to be gratified at the particular affection of Baron and Baroness James de Rothschild. But always unaccountable in her allusions, she spoke with less gratitude of "*their so-called charitable daughter*." "The old Baron and Baroness, my protectors against this wicked jealous sister of Alphonse, Edward and Gustave (*my then favourite*)" (Letter, *ibid.*).

worry was only too well justified. She had every reason to fear that she might suddenly be deprived of this sinecure.

A rising of the populace, a change in the Ministry, or some *crispian* whim, would have sufficed to interrupt those blessed remittances, and to cut off her supplies. By anticipation she entreated and protested, addressing sharp reminders to her King Humbert. She felt too surely that her life would always depend on that of others! What a pitiful day it would be for her if, during a riot in Paris, the clamouring mob should be seized with the idea of burning the mansion in the Rue Saint-Florentin;¹ or if, in the event of a revolution in Rome, Crispi should undertake to establish republican government in Italy! "That," she said, "together with Alphonse's death, would complete the bouquet of my liabilities." She trembled also lest her king should be assassinated, for however foolhardy his politics might be, he was a good paymaster. We must not forget, indeed, that the fatal stab² had been prophesied by her: the historic murder, the conscious regicide of Bresci, which occurred seven months after the Countess de Castiglione's death.³

To recover her spirits and to look about her at close range she again set out for Italy, considering it

¹ The ancient Hôtel de Talleyrand, sold to the Rothschilds by the Duchess de Dino.

² "To crown the whole, there must needs be only the end of Alphonse and the (probable) stabbing of Humbert" (Letter ccvii.).

³ In another of her letters concerning King Humbert and his consort, Marguerite, she writes thus of the royal pair: "Rome would raise altars in the Greek style to me, if I stopped them in their disaster, if I saved from drowning (those of the House of Savoy) and suffocating, the monarchy that is being killed by this ungrateful, hard, and ignorant son. Ah! if it were his father, there would be no state of siege; the people would be on their knees! But this Marguerite always fails in everything" (Letter cclxi.).

a counsel of prudence not to let herself be entirely forgotten there, and holding that her reappearance from time to time was necessary. Even though she had been authorised to live abroad, she must not appear to be a permanent fixture in Paris. Without this precaution, which did not enrich her, to be sure, but which chronically relieved her mind, did she not risk, in the eyes of her Government, becoming more and more of a foreigner—more and more the Countess of Paris, as they called her? The logical result would be that the royal purse would grow tired of constantly serving a pension to a person who never by any chance turned up to receive it.

To the last she refused to part with the treasures and mementoes of her past, her laces, porcelains, or jewels; and so she spent many trying hours, though she never knew deep and hopeless misery.

One day very near the end, when her maid and her coachman had deserted her, she walked feebly to the Boulevard de la Madeleine. A flower-shop attracted her, and she could not resist entering. There she emptied her purse to buy a bunch of roses, superb and of rare fragrance, and she returned home, more than half consoled at having satisfied one of her last surviving luxuries. She never lost her taste for flowers and pearls. Another time, when in Florence on business, she was captivated by a goldsmith's show-case, illuminated by the sun's rays. There had been days of plenty, when, in the same place, each one of her wishes was immediately gratified; and perhaps her imagination deceived her into thinking that those happy times were about to return. At any rate, the Countess pushed open the door of the sumptuous shop. Thinking she desired to satisfy some charming fancy, the shopkeeper

and his assistants pressed forward, offering for her inspection a great variety of precious stones glittering in their open cases. She touched the delicate jewels with a knowing hand. Immediately she coveted a certain ring and a pink pearl, the like of which she did not possess among her necklaces. She wanted both, as well as a certain bracelet of exquisite workmanship. . . . She would have carried them away with her, if, on looking into her purse, she had not been suddenly awakened from her dream by the actual state of her finances. She was obliged to leave them with the merchant, who watched the departure of the disconsolate great lady with a certain air of sympathy.¹ This was but one of many experiences still more trying to the pride of a woman who, in the days of her youth and social triumph, had never been without her carriage, never had to hesitate as to the gratification of her every whim.

Occasionally her purse was replenished. She then unhesitatingly made up her mind to satisfy the most expensive fantasies of her artist's whim, at the risk of abandoning that whim a moment afterwards for another.

The Countess might have saved herself some crushing lessons during the worst phases of her financial embarrassments, if she had taken more forethought for the morrow, and used a little reason and sagacity. One day she was estimating her daily expenses, and had soon cast up her accounts. All she found in her purse were thirteen sous; thirteen exactly, and of these she determined to spend ten for flowers and three for coal. She had reached such depths of despair that there rose

¹ "I excited their pain and pity with my air of a wretched great lady; with my *non voglio del non posso*. I all but had the most beautiful things, but at once relinquished them with a sad smile—just as I used to at Dieppe, when M. Georges [her child] cried: 'Not that, Nina! We can't have it'" (Letter cccliv.).

before her gloomy visions of ending matters once for all ; she harboured ideas of asphyxiation in her room, or of a fatal plunge into the Seine. The spectre of vulgar want had finally bowed her iron spirit, and those about her felt it and refused to do her service.¹

A well-timed cheering-up : perhaps the visit of a Rothschild or the arrival of the Italian post had carried her over more than one cruel difficulty, and dispelled the oppressive nightmare. A flash of renewed gaiety then lit up her brain and showed her that things were not so black, after all. She would not be forced, in the decline of life, to play the part of a mother in some low play-house, or to sing as a beggar at church doors ! However enfeebled her reasoning faculties might be, she was not ignorant of the fact that her jewels, although they had already been encroached upon, still formed a valuable asset, and that she was not in danger of dying of starvation.

But whatever the positive income from her Italian estates, or the resources, of which her rich and numerous jewels were the guarantee, Mme. de Castiglione, during the last years, had really lost all sense of management. The extravagant rent she paid, coupled with her disbursements for the family and the expenses of her lawsuits outside of France, consumed a large part of her

¹ " The tipsy nurse uses morphine or ether, goes mad and ill-treats me. To get rid of him I had to do battle and pay his extortionate claims. I am dead, but you won't believe it until I'm buried. I shall end by dying quickly, and well with what still remains to me : three sous for the coal, and ten for flowers. And then they tell me to go to the mountain ! " (Letter dxxxii.). On another occasion she ended a statement of accounts thus : " And the pocket-book fell dead at my feet, with thirty-nine sous contained in it " (Letter cccxxii.). She exaggerated the bad state of her money affairs. Thirty-nine sous in her pocket, but a million in jewels, and probably two millions in buildings.

irregular revenue. After clearing off such arrears as she owed, either through her own fault or through circumstances, she was ready to believe that she had been unjustly deprived of the best part of her possessions.

From time to time, as I have said, Alphonse de Rothschild dropped some generous manna into the muddle of her affairs, but all this went no one knew whither. Often she charged a servant to rush off to the "universal uncle" with some of her bracelets, her silver, or divers other objects!¹ For example, a silver hand-bell, which she regarded as particularly useful; for the moment she was in funds she hastened to redeem it. Passing from one extreme to the other, she contented herself, one day, with a loan of ten francs on a certain statuette, a vague "Sower" or "Bather," unsigned—and two days later she had only just enough with a hundred thousand francs received for an assortment of laces, pearls, and diamonds. These were disconcerting ups and downs.

The inevitable consequence of this state of things was, that the proud Countess did nothing but lament, so that her most devoted friends could hardly avoid feeling awkward and uneasy now, when they rang at her door and the complicated system of bolts was put into motion to admit them. It seemed to them that the one point on which she was sensitive, lack of money, recurred a little too often in the course of the conversation. This uneasiness she was the first to perceive whenever, as she was preparing to entertain her visitors with that familiar subject, they took an abrupt leave—as, for instance, the Duke de Chartres did one morning. "The

¹ "The faithful friend in stormy weather has been to 'her Aunt's' to carry all her bracelets there. When are you coming?" (Letter ccxviii.).

"My financial means? Exhausted at 'my Aunt's,' by dint of supplying her with them" (Letter cccxxii.).

Colonel," she wrote, a moment after his hasty departure, "has escaped. He guessed that I was going to ask him for something."

Add to this her difficulties with servants, her house-keeping worries! Mme. de Castiglione had frequented the society of great noblemen; she flattered herself that she had ruled princes; she had employed her intelligence in order to carry at least half-way to completion certain magnificent projects. In her own world she had been very sincerely admired, as one of the artisans of the political resurrection of her country; her charms had helped her to influence the plans and foreign policy of Napoleon III.; she had rendered unquestionable services to the French cause and to French interests.

Yet never, during the working out of these important combinations, of these diplomatic conceptions and projects, with all that they implied of secret correspondence, of constant relations with the ministries, of an incessant activity in the pursuit of information, and of indefatigable intrigue—never, by her own showing, had she been face to face with so many difficulties, never had she had to fight so hard as now, at the end of her life, in her daily and unassisted battle with her landlord. He was a complex personage, a handsome fellow, a dealer in wines and horses, and himself a fairly good sportsman; but, according to her, he was nothing, in times of stress, but the detested employer, the greedy owner of the building in Paris where she had fixed her "wandering destiny." In her letters what a torrent of lamentations! No house-proprietor in any scene of *bourgeois* comedy was ever so reviled, so branded as her enemy, the landlord (save when, at times, sweet eyes were made at him).

He, on his side, lost his temper over her crotchets ; he objected to her nocturnal frolics, and to being domineered over by a head which he had every reason to believe was devoid of ordinary common sense. He protested against her disagreeable exactions, both for herself and for her pet animals (the dogs were let out only at night, at unreasonable hours), and against her habits and ways that sinned against every law of health and compromised the common interests of his tenants. She, meanwhile, never ceased her recriminations against her landlord's "impudence" in watching her like an Argus ; his coarse language, as she put it ; and the countless discomforts, annoyances, and tribulations that were inflicted on her by his tyrannical regulations.¹

"It is impossible to live with this devil of a man," she cried ; "he goes so far as to enter my rooms, in spite of me. I shall have to leave the house and even this part of town, and so lose my tradespeople and my credit!"² A whole file of her letters are filled to overflowing with the causes and consequences of these afflicting discussions which, two or three times, nearly ended in personal violence. Was such a state of things tolerable ?

To tell the truth, the Countess never failed to arouse distrust and uneasiness among all who were thrown in her way, owing to her abnormal manner of life and her constant "state of nerves." On one occasion it had been necessary to break open her door. A police commissary had imposed upon her a domiciliary visit. The official called upon to fulfil this duty had every reason to regret it, moreover, if it be true, as Mme. de Castiglione maintained, that she cast the *evil eye* on

¹ Probably in her case they were only to prevent worse things.

² Letter cccclxv.

him, in her wrath at his lawful housebreaking; for he died the next day while reporting the decease of a malefactor.

Something, indeed, was always happening. Once, in the middle of the night, at the door of the house, a violent scene had occurred between her and her "Balzac," and such dreadful words had been pronounced,¹ that the police had felt obliged to interfere. An honest brigadier threatened to take them both off to the police-station. Both, however, were finally suffered to return home, and the hostile elements were calmed and reconciled. The Countess was so accustomed to that sort of attack, that she had almost forgotten this particular one, when one morning she saw her persecutor (who was perhaps, after all, only a landlord hard put to it by a particularly trying tenant) dressed for riding, with a gardenia in his button-hole and sending her from below a bow and a smile.² This was a burst of sunshine after the downpour, but the uproar began again worse than ever. There came a certain day when some particularly outrageous eccentricity of Her Whimsical Highness had so exasperated the said Balzac, that he altogether lost his head, frightening Mme. de Castiglione's household out of their wits, with the jerky outbursts of his scolding voice and his threats of a horse-whipping. The coachman, the nurse, the maid had fled in terror, and, beside himself with rage, he next

¹ "Last evening, at midnight, across the two pavements of the Rue Cambon, and in the presence of the cab which was standing at the grating, he applied a volley of abuse to me, yelling at the top of his voice: 'You pester me to death and I'll turn you out of doors!'" (Letter dxxiii.).

² There were reconciliations, to which what was left of her coquetry chiefly contributed:

"In the meantime, Balzac is paying court to me—his wife is gone away. We take a walk every night in front of the. . . . We are being noticed" (Letter cccxc.).

attacked the Countess herself, declaring that he would have her thrown into the street at the hands of the sheriff. The effect on her was a nervous shock which lasted for some time; she dreaded lest a scene of that sort might be renewed during a visit from her princes.

If one were to take her word for it (but it is impossible to believe her without great reservation) there was no conceivable malice which "the despot, the extortioner" did not invent and bring into play against her and her peace of mind. Thus, in order to please a species of Cossack,¹ a very troublesome neighbour, who wanted a great deal of air, had not the landlord given orders that the seven windows on the staircase were to be kept open every day? (Of this Russian she always spoke as an "inhabitant of the steppes subject to *delirium tremens*.") And in consequence had not she, the unhappy Countess, lost all her "vital heat"?²

Does this, moreover, exhaust the list of her afflictions? By no means. People in the pay of the enemy, as she thinks, go so far as to gain forced access to her, blowing out her lamp, upsetting her night-light. They claim to direct her, they domineer over her, they persist in trying to make out that she is demented. Indignities descend upon her like a torrent. Alas! Is this really the marvellous Countess de Castiglione, the incomparable and divine who now groans over such petty things?

¹ A Russian who had simply rented an apartment above hers, on the third floor.

² "I am ill in consequence of the draughts caused by the stairway door and by the windows that, according to the owner's orders, are kept open. That is in the daytime. At night I have that terrible Russian overhead and his females, who in front of my door, at my bed, howl, cough, spit, insult one another, with menials like themselves. All of them wish me out of the house; and some night they will play me a bad trick, for no one is willing to sleep here, neither my Russian house-surgeons, nor my friends, nor my priest, not one of them caring to expose himself to these Balzacian and other disturbances" (Letter cccclxx.).

Wrangling and loud contention, open affronts, perpetual threats of expulsion, and a kind of inconceivable subjection that rivets her to her chains—what a picture!

Such was her lot, after she had been driven away from her "Column." She had had to shut herself up in a chill and gloomy room, where her only outlook was a span of grey sky; where she had to endure humiliating worries from vile neighbours; ill and abandoned, she had to bear the cold, the wind, the reeking damp, and say to herself that she was irrevocably condemned to this and could only escape from it by death.

Where was there ever so pitiable a condition as hers, exposed as she was all day long to the malevolent interventions of the man she called *Balzac*, and who was none other than the hospitable person on whom, in her imagination, she fancied she depended, not to have to spend the night *couchée à la belle étoile*! By what malicious fate had she been driven into this impossible house, this "cavern"?¹ Are we to regard her complaints as exaggerated, the picture overdrawn? People go out and come in with turbulent company, making an impossible racket at impossible hours. The entire mob makes the whole staircase ring, stamping, singing, shrieking. And this staircase by night is sometimes, she cries, the scene of the most horrible orgies, full, as it is, of drunken and naked women, bawling and bespattering each other with obscenities! Unhappy Nina! She is obliged to hear them till it pleases them to stop; and even worse, they assume that she, too—

¹ No insuperable reason forced her to remain there, however. A short time before her death some friends were looking for a private *hotel* for her in Paris, where she might perhaps have recovered from all these harrying agitations.

the great lady fallen from her high estate—belongs to their class.¹

Thoughtful friends proposed that she should have the companionship of a nun to nurse her! What! A good sister there, in that place of perdition, to overhear the midnight revels! Why, only the devil's own sister could be expected to dwell in "such a hell." The same tiresome repetition occurs over and over again: exaggerated, with envenomed details, atrabillious and spiteful. And in order to be so magnificently uncomfortable, the Countess is ruining herself.

Does she not mention the bills for her various lodgings amounting to eighteen thousand francs² from January to January? For, as I have said, she had kept several apartments in Paris, whether she occupied them or not. I was given the opportunity of visiting one of these in the Rue Castiglione. It was here she kept a supply of Lyons silk stuffs, her court dresses, and all kinds of objects and souvenirs to which she clung. This strange lodging had remained closed for many years: like a reliquary guarding the fragments of a soul! When the daylight invaded this dark and dusty place, there was found a large blue cushion, edged with a gilt braid and with tassels at the four corners: and

¹ "I pass for being one of them, and I can receive here neither woman, nor child, nor priest, not even a physician."

² "I am ruining myself and am ill-treated. Leaving out food, I have paid 18,000 francs a year" (Letter cccxiv.). And if at least she could have counted on reliable service! But how is she served—she, Madame de Castiglione? "Saturday noon. That is the hour when your amusing letter rings at my door. My answer will be short and inadequate, because at this moment my poor mind is occupied in managing to procure some means of bodily sustenance which seem to vanish. Without my *bell-ringers* [her visitors] I should truly be unable to get anything for breakfast in this same Paris, where I find that proper service is an illusion, except at a dinner of the Orléans." That is to say, when one or the other of the Princes of Orléans came to dine with her in the *Salon des Roses*, next door to her room (Letter ccci.).

on the cushion a cast of the arm of a little child, that of the charming boy whom she had lost, whose name was George. The interior decoration of the apartment was in no way remarkable. What struck one, rather, was the ordinary stout blue fabric used in the hangings of the room. They had obviously been chosen for their colour to absorb and subdue the light. In the ceiling the folds met in a rosette with a boss in the middle. The dining-room was similarly hung, but in old rose-colour. The general effect was dingy, and the low, narrow rooms did not at all give one the idea of a cosy, harmonious, and pleasant nest. Everything belonging to her, everything surrounding her, was bound to bear an odd look.

A voluntary prisoner, she submitted to her captivity as to an inflexible law, convinced of her inability to escape from it save by short flights. Nevertheless, as we have seen, she knew of several available shelters in Paris, where she had piled up in confusion a thousand things—her portraits, her papers, not counting those deposited with friends and in storage warehouses. That did not matter ; she remained shut up all day long in the Rue Cambon.¹

Every one expressed surprise at her becoming such a slave to her worries. Such explanations as she gave can hardly be said to bear the stamp of having emanated from a very well-balanced brain ; such, for instance, as that a simple *bourgeois* house could not have harboured

¹ " You speak of a little sunny apartment where I could receive my real friends, while making the others believe that I was in Rome. That is an impossible dream. A small apartment with everything that I possess in Paris ! It's ridiculous. Don't you know that I had two other apartments besides that of the 'Column,' and still have the storage-place ?" (Letter cccxviii.).

her ; that the timorous and regular habits of life of its inmates would at once have taken alarm at the originality, or as more than one person said, the manifest eccentricity of her conduct and bearing ; then there was the curiosity that her mysterious personality and her past glory evoked among the reporters. Eyes unaccustomed to night life would hardly know what to make of the caprice that possessed her to go out every evening, or nearly so, and to walk the streets with her pack¹ till long after midnight, exposing herself to vexatious interference on the part of the police.

When night spread its thick veil over the city—a moonless night, mellow and close—she would wrap herself in her cloak and glide with short steps through the shadows of the streets dotted with lights. Dressed uniformly in dark colours, she wore as well a double veil, and was generally followed by her two fat and ugly little dogs. Belated people caught a glimpse of a woman of singular appearance, in an old-fashioned dress with short flounces, and they observed that she stopped and gazed pertinaciously at the windows of a certain apartment that was closed, and perhaps untenanted. It was Mme. de Castiglione looking up at her former lodgings in the Place Vendôme, where, following upon her radiant years, the disenchanted period of her life had sadly passed. But let us look well at her roving shadow. She wanders along the walls without apparent aim, absorbed in her undefined reveries. By chance she hastens her pace in a certain direction, having suddenly remembered that her Norman friend had been expected that morning and had probably gone to his hotel. Without a thought of the hour, and utterly unconcerned as to the seasonableness of her visit, she

¹ If one may use such a term of her two fat and tiny pug-dogs.

makes a fuss at the door, awakening the whole house, and after that is provoked at the servants, who "detest her."

I see her, in one of these fantastic flights and peregrinations through her usual haunts—under the echoing arcades of the Rue de Castiglione or in the more deserted streets near the Place de la Concorde—putting off as long as her infirmities will allow her return home to the place she abominates yet refuses to leave. Sometimes she counts the stars, or now lowers her gaze to the pavement as she wanders along the perfectly empty street, unconsciously stopping in front of the refuse boxes, starting desperate conversations with the reconnoitring scavengers, and consoling herself with these poor devils for the bitter deceptions that her intercourse with the mighty had engendered.¹

Coming home, tired out after her irrational rambles, she doffs her dark garments, and finally decides to take a belated rest. But the early sun will find her wide awake again, preparing, pencil in hand, supposititious meetings and elaborate plans, which run grave risk of never being carried out; occasionally regretting that her friend, the confidant of her daily worries, does not live near by, so that he might come to see her at eight o'clock, at her early breakfast, to listen to her grievances and to exchange bitter reflections with her

¹ "I had to get out of the house, so as not to see or hear, so as to breathe. I remained in the street watching the shooting-stars, passing up and down in front of the brigadier who sleeps under the windows of Alphonse (de Rothschild). 'Countess, I can't let you stay there. The sergeants on their rounds will arrest you and take you to the police-station.' 'Yes, thanks, you are right.' But how get in? Every outlet was closed. This was one of the nights, like many I have spent, footsore with travelling over Alphonse's pavement, and making the rag-pickers chatter. What despised castes there are that are unknown!" (Letter cccxviii.).

Then, in the same letter and without any transition, she gives personal recollections of the Queen of Denmark, who had just died.

on human perversity—and remain with her till late, very late, for instance, when, at midnight or after, she really has to go to bed: a manner of life, moreover, which she deemed quite natural, although her friends censure it and the servants make fun of her. For there had already begun to grow up a legend about her, a strange and pitiful one.

As the Countess no longer took any satisfaction in going through the daily performance of dressing her hair, of rigging herself out, and of adorning herself for a few hours, taking such pains for her own pleasure alone, she gradually sank into indifference and began to neglect herself. Indoors, she often wrapped herself in a single garment, a dressing-gown of black velvet lined with white quilting, and thought it unnecessary to interpose any linen or other material between her body and the garment. When she went out, in order to keep out the air and the cold, she put on a kind of leggings, made of the same stuff and lined with ermine, and these came up to the top of the leg like silk stockings. This was another of her peculiarities.

“All the misfortunes of mankind,” says Pascal, “are due to the fact of not knowing how to remain quietly in a room.”

Mme. de Castiglione surely was shut in and by herself, far from delusive ambitions and disappointing pleasures; but I do not observe that she was made any the happier thereby. Things were at their worst, she said, trying in vain to speak lightly. “I have troubles enough to put a bullet through my brain if I were a weak man; but I am a strong woman, a *woman* too at certain times. I take it out in weeping at night and

raging in the daytime, and giving up everything, even the pleasure of writing and answering you, for thou knowest that writing is the sole consolation I have."

Meanwhile, her malady was embittering her character. She was aggressive in her retorts, tactless in her utterances, and at times fits of peevishness indicated the beginnings of a gloomy old age.

Her evening walks were not taken in the pursuit of diversion—theatres, parties, visits. She went almost invariably to the same places: either to the English bookseller, Galignani, or to his Parisian colleagues in the Rue Castiglione, Timotéi, Gateau, who knew her very well; or to the reading-room of the Grand Hotel, to meet her confidant when he was passing through Paris.

But as time went by it was plain that her ideas were becoming confused. A medley of disturbing visions passed through her head, such as she had never been subject to before and which kept her in the house a prisoner, bolted in and padlocked. She imagined herself to be the object of secret persecutions; she was the victim of intrigues, and her fretful moods became daily more and more accentuated. A morbid anxiety bewildered her mind, and her deranged and clouded brain gave a sinister meaning to the least act or circumstance connected with any unavoidable visit to the house. Her suspicions extended to all who lived with her or came near her: to servants, neighbours, trades-people; they were all spies and enemies, assassins, thieves.

Almost the sole company nowadays of the former Court favourite was the society of two podgy little dogs, obese and bad smelling. In the evening, curiously attired, she took them out herself into the street, where one might meet her as she hugged the walls in her promenade. She credited her dogs with a calm affection

and fidelity, such as she would have looked for in vain in humankind. She often repeated to her correspondent at Baromesnil, while admitting that he was an exception, *that the better she knew men the more she loved dogs.*

Yet she dreaded absolute solitude like death. As her morose melancholy grew upon her, with her mania of persecution, she required companionship of some kind to soothe her fears. Alas! she who, of old, had refused to share her couch with demi-gods, was now obliged to lower her pretensions, and her letters contain the most unexpected details of her choice, so often the result of fear or caprice.

In the cold of winter, like the majority of those who sleep alone, she used the indispensable hot-water bottle to warm her bed. But, with her usual bad luck, it happened one night as she was undressing, that her "monk" or *mari chaud*, as she had jokingly dubbed this utensil, rolled on the floor and broke one of her toes. A surgical operation was required.¹ She had ever after banished the hot-water bottle, and having nothing better at the moment to take its place, she had asked a humble woman who was especially charged with the janitress's work to come and sleep with her.² On that occasion she had no choice. Of women friends she had not a single one, and her "maiden," as she nicknamed her servant (a great gadabout, this "maiden!"), had returned to the *école des hommes*. A

¹ "Am chained to my bed on account of the mangling and amputation of the second toe of my left foot. It's the result of a ridiculous accident. The falling out of bed and the shock of the boiling water-bottle that serves me as a 'warming husband.' And I was to have gone to my mountain on serious business. So true it is a 'monk' may change the face of the world!" (Letter cccxviii.).

² "But, bless me!—why didn't you come up? The portress was with me, in my bed, when her husband, who is deaf, but not blind, brought me the papers and letters" (Letter dxi.).

far drop this, from the society of statesmen and crowned heads to the promiscuities of the servants' hall.

Her coachman, who was more than once without occupation, failed to respond to her signal; quite as often her "maiden" was elsewhere than at the market or in the kitchen. And as she always had a hobby or whim in her head and it hurt her to wait, she never hesitated to employ no matter what messenger, provided her letters were carried and her errands done. There was a certain chimney-sweep whom she honoured with her confidence and protection to the point of making him mount on the carriage, beside the above-mentioned coachman, when she sent him on some business. Once, after ten o'clock at night, did she not send a grotesque creature, very old and half-mad, to the hotel of "*her prince*"? This person, whom she had dressed out in a sort of ball-dress of most comical effect, had fairly to fight her way into the brilliant temple of royalty, where a gala reception was being given.¹

¹ This was in the Rue Jean-Goujon, at the house of the Duke de Chartres.

"At last on Saturday the 13th I took advantage of a visit from that dreadful old creature. With her hundred years she was going to the masked ball, and I entrusted her with a short note to be given to the Goujon porter. 'Thirteen . . . what is that?'—It was Marie Antoinette's phrase on seeing the tumbrel. The old crone was received almost with tomahawk blows by the sergeants with their sabres, who wanted to bar her entrance. But edging through the illuminations, line of carriages, open gratings, and the court filled with flowers and lights, she reached there all the same, and not at all out of countenance, she said to the police officers, 'You want to know if I'm not a beggar in disguise? Very well, come and see how they will receive me at the porter's lodge, and you can see through the grating whether I'm known here. As to why I have come here, that's none of your business.' And there in the lodge she calmly sat, where the only guardian was a large white dog, well combed and trimmed and perfumed, who began to dance around the old witch.

"'You need not be surprised,' she said again to the sergeants, 'I belong to the house.' The dog went to look for the porter, and led him to the lodge. He too was trimmed and powdered, in blue and red breeches, with silver galloons. He bows to the aged woman, courteously leads her inside, receives from her my note, and leads her back in the face of the police glued to the grating, crying, 'Room for this aged dame!'" (Letter cccxiv.).

With her everything proceeded by fits and starts. Her undisciplined imagination always went to extremes, yet she demanded that everybody should fall into line behind it. Her last friends were less eager to respond to her appeals, fearing the dire consequences. The Duke d'Aumale came but rarely and furtively, and the Duke de Chartres, while he had not entirely given up his polite visits, was visibly lengthening the intervals between them. Rothschild never came in person; now and then he sent some one. Cléry turned up only when he considered his presence necessary to prevent her from taking a false step in the matter of lawsuits or financial agreements. Without utterly deserting her, Estancelin pleaded more often than formerly the obstacle of distance. With the Countess one could never feel quite sure of the point where her excessive imagination would call a halt.

Moreover, she was as prone to worry over the affairs of her acquaintances as with regard to herself. Daring no longer to trust the walls' discretion—walls, as every one knows, have ears—she felt obliged to forbid her friends to come to see her. She regarded it as a boon when she was able to offer them a safe rendezvous, far from the curiosity of inferiors, far from schemers and spies and unscrupulous newspaper hacks. For instance, it was an excellent arrangement when she was allowed to summon them to the editor's office of her physician Dr. Janicot.¹ He was a delightful man, and one wonders why the Countess de Castiglione should have coupled his memory with a disagreeable

¹ "I ask myself what you can be doing here, good or bad, in Paris—you who, formerly, never left our sofa? Meet me to-day at 32 Rue des Mathurins, at *The Medical Bulletin*, where our medical staff has put a private and heated office at our service. There we can talk openly without fear of eavesdroppers as in an hotel room" (Letter cclxv.).

nickname.¹ But the free use of his office was not always at her disposal. Then, the alternative was sad. Soon, she declared, half in jest, she would be reduced to "the meeting-places of adulterous Parisians: churches and *chalets de nécessité*. Exactly like the Princes in exile, at the Palace Necessitados."² These were the last flashes of cheerfulness from her pen; for in proportion as the shadow about her grew denser, her bitterness increased. Ill in body and soul, she dragged herself through the days, intensely embittered by her failures and the perfidy of fate. Discontented with the past, irritated with the present, exhausted by the incessant tension of her nerves and her daily, hourly experiences which rendered her more feverish and more sensitive, she was literally wasting away. She had developed a positive aversion for the new civilisation, for the noisy, glaring, bustling highways, for the rush of the motor-cars which made it a mortal venture even to step into the street. Moreover, had it not always been her lot to be a predestined victim for the blows of chance—as a bride, a widow, and now as an old woman . . . *without appearing to be?*³ God, the Devil, the priests, and the landlords—"a race of brigands"—all of them had been her enemies.

All her wishes are dead, all her ambitions extinguished; her present is uncertain and fleeting; it is no longer worth while taking any personal care of herself—she would not even trouble to have an egg boiled, if it were not for the obligation of keeping up

¹ "La Rosse."

² An allusion to the Necessitados Palace at Lisbon occupied by the noble friends of her correspondent, the Duke and Duchess de Montpensier. It was from there that their nephew, the Duke de Chartres, had just written her that he was shortly to return to Paris.

³ *Without appearing to be!* A woman and a coquette to the last, she had hastened to apply this corrective to her lamentations.

the machine before it goes completely to pieces, and the necessity of warming her bedridden pains, close to the thorny roses strewn over her bed. She may die now; she has no further interest in reminding any one of her existence.

Her health, indeed, was noticeably failing, and she herself seemed to be wantonly thrusting obstacles in the way of even a temporary amelioration, by her singular indifference to any and every hygienic consideration. The wonderful harmony of her whole physical being had always produced, even to envy, the impression of absolutely perfect health, yet now the decline of life had reached her prematurely.¹ The gradual destruction of her organs was only too quickly accelerated by secret troubles, by mental decay, by her wilful violation of all hygienic rules. The time had arrived when she must struggle almost unceasingly against weariness of mind and infirmity of body. Suffering had taken up its abode with her like a morose and permanent guest. She now had, almost entirely, to give up going out; and so she relieved her affliction by talking and writing everlastingly about her miseries; giving details, painful and humorous, all in the same breath, of her thirteen chronic ailments, each of which, according to her, was serious, and two of which, at least, according to the doctors, were mortal.

But while Mme. de Castiglione's visitors from the

¹ "Janicot writes me to come to him at Pougues, two or three months at least, to fatten and stuff myself, as if that were possible without teeth!" (Letter dlxxi.).

The same letter contains this amusing contrast: "Saint-Amant, still always in love with me, is publishing *France-Italie*, but does not mention me in it, either rightly or wrongly. I shall administer a drubbing to him" (*Ibid.*).



The Comtesse de Castiglione
by an unknown artist.
from the Spaccio Museum,
formerly in the Emperor's apartments.



upper social world were now only a memory, those of the doctors increased in number in her gloomy dwelling. Every night a house-surgeon occupied a room next to hers. Little by little she had resigned herself to the thought that she would never regain possession of her active faculties or recover her strength; that she must keep to her bed, day and night, as if that were her natural element,¹ and perceive but one chance of deliverance: the grave. Inclined to overstate the imminence of her death, she had not to dread its approach as a surprise. Her mind perpetually dwelt on it. By force of evoking a vision of death and gazing fixedly on it, she had invested the spectre with a look of familiarity. She had succeeded in contemplating it with a mitigated bitterness which had become a kind of melancholy habit untinged by grief or anguish. She seemed to desire the approach of death as that of a helpful friend; and as she was quite disposed to impute to others her own sensations of sadness, disappointment, and extreme weariness, she exhorted those of her friends whom she knew to be dragging out a maimed or aimless existence, to court likewise a speedy ending. "Come and let us die together," she wrote to one of them in the most natural tone in the world, as though it had been a question of an ordinary invitation.

Certain persons who did not know her were profoundly touched by her physical and mental afflictions. One of the few who had kept a place of welcome in this abode of confusion (in this respect the symbol of the disordered imagination of its occupant), often wrote and spoke of her to a friend of his, a woman of intelligence

¹ "The consultation has condemned me: I cannot live. I ought to have the courage to kill myself. I am no longer allowed to move *for the least thing*. Bed is ordered by the doctors, on pain of a paralysis of the kidneys. Vertebral column incurable" (Letter dx.).

and heart. She wished to be kept informed of everything that concerned the Countess, everything good or bad, and every day she asked for details. What was the state of the patient's mind? What her latest cause of complaint? Had she perhaps been vexed the other day by a harsh word or wounded by a letter? She was suffering, and that was a sufficient reason why her last visitors should bring her the few joys of this world which it was now left to her to appreciate. Some friends urged her to shake off her gloomy presentiment, to try to adopt more tranquil and more regular habits, to take more nourishment, to recover her mental tone, above all, *se secouer*, "pull herself together." But she replied, "What is the good?" and with a malicious touch, such as she could still summon at intervals, she added that it was not so easy to *se secouer* when one was alone. Then she returned to her presentiments of death.

To her correspondents who were well on in years and burdened with their own afflictions, she harped so constantly on this subject that they could not help finding her insistence in the worst possible taste. Why force upon them misgivings as to their age or their health and constrain them to dwell on their own miseries; why dole out to them the hours which they were still permitted to enjoy?

But she persisted in her lugubrious preoccupations as to her demise, elaborating the general outlines of her last strange will and testament, in which, intentionally and systematically, she repudiated the existence of any family ties¹ (though such ties really existed); affirmed

¹ This eccentric document, in more than one place so irrational, was strangely impressive in others. On one of its pages she had written with a red pencil and in a large hand: "No heirs. . . . Without any family, either in France or Italy, although there are absolute strangers bearing the same

more stoutly than ever that she desired absolute annihilation in this life and in the life beyond—in future as in the present ;¹ and with her feverish hand scrawled the most minute directions regarding her laying-out,² her obsequies and burial.

Sometimes she was seized with the freak of threatening to dispense with it all—(the Seine being so near !)—since it was not within her means to be buried in marble, and they wanted none of her in the cemetery of her beloved Passy. Above all, she was anxious to pass away

names—of Oldoini, Rapallini, Lamporecchi, de Castiglione, Caspigliole, Asinari, Verasis. . . .”

She had forgotten to add to the list the Tribone of Genoa, distant kin to the Oldoini, who by virtue of this very omission inherited her buildings and jewels amounting to two millions of francs.

¹ “To all the mortuary executors of my last moments and my last wishes, and to the testamentary administrators of Paris and of La Montagne at Spezia, in Italy ; also to other persons whom I may name I particularly request that nothing, of any nature whatever, be said or revealed to the lawyers and barristers, to the officers of the Ministries, of kings and princes ; neither to friends, nor to any delegates of future governments in France, imperial or royal.

“In my status as an Italian subject, belonging to the Court of King Humbert, I, in person, forbid the French Prefect of Police himself, and the Public Prosecutor of the Republic himself, to touch anything ; either to search, seize, sequester, or seal anything, discarding and excluding from this immediate execution the Italian Consul, Lucchesi Palli, and all ambassadors, councillors, secretaries, and those receiving wages from the Embassy.”

² She had ordered, piece by piece, the laying-out for the tomb :—

“Nightgown of Compiègne 1857, of cambric and lace ; long, striped dressing-gown, black velvet, white plush (being at No. 14 Rue Cambon) ; on my neck the necklace of pearls *petite fille*, nine rows, six white and three black : the everyday necklace that I have always worn, with the perforated sou with a crystal clasp, monogram and crown, which all the dressers know ; on my bare and pendant arms my two bracelets, one with an onyx pearl in the centre ; and one of black enamel, with a star and brilliants which are elsewhere.

“The pillow which will be in the basket henceforth by me designated and prepared, and in perfect condition, to wit : in cross-stitch embroidery in white floss-silk, lined with violet satin, with four corners, bouquets of pansies, embroidered, as a child, by my son, at the Café Anglais, in Paris ; a violet cord around and four tassels.”

And she adds respecting the pets she missed : “The two dogs of No. 26 Place Vendôme (stuffed) will be placed at my feet during the last night, as I

calmly, without identification : no publicity, no letters, articles, or biographies, no sign that should betray the fact that she had vanished into eternal night.¹

Nevertheless, as far as it was possible, she fought against the progress of the disease, refusing neither the aid of science nor the stimulus of substantial nourishment. While asserting that she ate nothing, she overfed herself, as she was required to do. But since several months she had become woefully emaciated, and it was only too evident that the end was near.

She had wished, as we have seen, that her death should go unchronicled. The funeral ceremony was to be kept anonymous ; there were to be no wreaths or flowers, no funeral oration, almost no witnesses. The last desires of her clouded brain were carried out only too precisely, for her few faithful friends were widely scattered. Cléry was in Venice, the Princes absent, the others in ignorance of her condition or intentionally unmindful. She had died almost suddenly, attended solely by a few old servants, notably the aged Luisa Corsi, her governess. None of them had been informed of her last wishes, and none of them knew what to do when she had breathed her last. It fell to the lot of one of her lawyers, a quite recent friend, Maitre Guillaume Desouches, to undertake the melancholy task usually imposed upon the family of the deceased. The

wish the vigil to be kept by my dead dogs, whom I named Sandouga and Kasino, my little one ; and to put them also into the coffin, at the same place, forming a cushion, one under each foot. Beside my pets, I wish their tiny music: *The Wave*, which used to start them dancing a waltz at No. 26 bis of the Column. I wish them beautifully dressed, blue and violet winter-coat, with my monogram and their names, and their collars of pink flowers and cypress."

¹ "An absolute prohibition to all the executors of my Will and Testament, as well as to all persons designated, to give any information whatever to whomsoever, regarding legacies, souvenirs, writings, portraits, or the dispersing of autographs." (Holograph, first draft of the Testament of the Countess de Castiglione.)

Duke of Vallombrosa, who in her glorious youth had known her well and greatly admired her, and whom she called cousin by courtesy (though he was only very distantly related, or not at all), was, besides Mr. Meyrargues, almost the only one present in the vault under the Madeleine. And he was almost the only one to drop the holy water on the coffin of her who had held so great a place in the world of the rich and powerful. "If I had not been there to escort her woeful remains," he wrote to some one who had greatly loved her, "there would have been no one present but hirelings!"

What was to become of the mortal remains of her who had once led captive princes and kings? Where was she to sleep her last sleep? Would she rest at Spezia or in Paris? This disturbing question was put by the Duke of Vallombrosa in the same melancholy letter.¹ The Paris that she had amazed, kept her. The entombment was kept secret. No pompous cenotaph was erected to her memory, and only a simple slab of granite marked her real resting-place. Several years afterwards, it was with great difficulty that this unknown tomb² could be pointed out to me, lost, as it was, in the wooded portion of Père-Lachaise. The inscription on it was effaced, and it bore no ornament. A poor and simple wreath of holly, all withered, covered its cold nakedness.

How cruel and implacable a reverse of so brilliant a destiny! . . .

¹ Private letter, Paris, December 8, 1899.

² "I have never received an inquiry from any of her heirs as to where the Countess was buried." (Private letter from Maitre Guillaume Desouches, June 27, 1901.)

CONCLUSION

GENERAL PORTRAIT OF THE COUNTESS DE CASTIGLIONE

IF it had been the fashion about 1857 to believe in metempsychosis, one might have said, as was indeed remarked later on by a clever woman,¹ that the soul of Cleopatra had returned in the admirable body of Mme. de Castiglione, who had been so appropriately created for a life of magnificence and to excite the love of one of the world's masters. Nobody was more conscious than she, or more intensely proud, of a perfection for which she was nevertheless destined to pay with constant sorrows and with the loss of many an illusion. The world's homage to her beauty she accepted with a kind of indifferent detachment, alluding to it with a frankness in which there was no vanity but merely the calm recognition of a quite obvious fact. At one of the few houses where she was a frequent visitor, before her voluntary retirement, she was informed of an addition to the family. She came running to see the child, kissed it, hung round its neck an amber necklace, and said to the young mother: "When he is grown up you will tell him that the first kiss he ever received was given him by the most beautiful woman of the century."

She had grown up in frivolous surroundings and had lived in an atmosphere of adulation almost from her birth. Every evening, at the theatre of La Pergola, at

¹ The Countess de Puliga.

an age when, no doubt, she would have preferred to be allowed to go to sleep rather than be taken to the play, the little Oldoini might be seen perched on a very high chair in the middle of the box, presenting to the house her infantile and drowsy grace.¹ She was then only five or six years old!

As soon as she had her formal introduction into society, she provoked an admiration which never ceased. She was still a mere girl when she was the centre of an army of suitors. They were legion who sought to find favour in her eyes, and their numbers would have been even greater if to her gift of fascination she had added a more winning and even disposition. But she undoubtedly lacked a caressing, enveloping feminine charm. She was aware of this, yet she did not try to acquire the missing quality. The transports inspired by her physical beauty were checked by her proud and somewhat haughty demeanour. Though smiles well became her deep red lips and the whiteness of her small, closely-set teeth, yet she was slow in giving expression to them. A certain disdain lurked in the corners of her mouth, and this, coupled with a kind of constraint which she affected in the midst of the general animation, differentiated her from her more natural and spontaneous Florentine compatriots, who were exceedingly prepossessing, and who had been trained from their earliest years in the art and manner of being gracious.

In her most dazzling period she doubtless took pleasure in presenting her beauty to the senses, like a flower exhaling its fragrance; but in general she appeared distant and cold, as if to arrest or frighten

¹ This detail is taken from a private letter of the Countess Luisa Capponi Bolgheri (Province of Pisa, February 19, 1912).

away any effusive demonstrations. And yet, in speech as well as in character, she exhibited a rare frankness. If, by chance, she could be tender and captivating, she never displayed these characteristics in the society of women. She cared very little for her own sex, and they returned twofold her lack of sympathy.¹

Despite the fact that she was born and nurtured in Italy, that land of beauty, where the very air one breathes is a stimulus to love, she was never seriously caught in the fever of passion. She was not predisposed by temperament to such tempestuous experiences. She could excite in others the thrill of love, but, judging from her letters, it took up a much smaller space in her real life than one would have imagined. I have scrutinised in vain the two so contrasted portions of her life—one characterised by political ambition and worldly triumph; the other given over to voluntary seclusion and gloomy self-effacement—and I have found no trace of romantic ardour, no question of burning kisses, of supreme ecstasy or of unfathomed despair. Her young dream was never realised, and was lost among the clouds. For a marriage which in no way satisfied her heart, she had thought two or three times of substituting an optional companionship which would have lacked the regularisation of the marriage contract. But her conception of such a union was that of an association of two moral energies striving together toward a higher goal—with only now and then more human intervals.

¹ These feminine peculiarities, of which I have previously spoken, go far back. She was not yet Mme. de Castiglione; she was not yet fifteen. When the Oldoini family was occupying the Palace Guigni, a great lady of Florence also lived there. Her impressions reached me long afterwards through one of her relatives. Although she sincerely admired the amazing beauty of the young Nina, she had never been able to feel any sympathy with her. "She was not my sort," she said. (Private letter, Bolgheri, February 19, 1912.)

The tender partnerships of Mme. de Castiglione were suspected rather than revealed. The favourite of a moment, she too, without doubt, had had her favourites; but she so speedily recovered her independence, she had so soon forgotten these episodes, that she scarcely granted her partners the right to remember them. A short intoxication, a surprise which for the imagination and the senses was often incomplete, there was little enough to fill one's memory, even if the adventure had really taken place; nothing really to prey upon one's mind, if one had accidentally had the honour of her favours. With her, times and circumstances were altogether relative; and she had reached the point of almost entirely erasing love from her past and present:

"For the thousandth but last time," she replied to an inquiring friend whom she had no intention of enlightening, "I repeat that I have passed my life in bed, but alone, ill, and without love of any kind."

Flattered, as she had been, during her youth, and surrounded and assailed on all sides by temptations, she reached the extreme phase of the sentimental life almost innocent of any strongly-felt passion. As for the rest, they were mere caprices, escapades, or, as in the case of Napoleon (when she was seventeen!), the force of circumstances: momentary sacrifices made to irresistible inclination pending the realisation of her hope of one day attaining a loftier end.

She was from birth neither affectionate nor sentimental; her dominant passion was ambition. The evidences of admiration for the superiority of her judgment shown by certain persons touched her much more keenly than the compliments lavished on the harmonious modelling of her body; and her success

at Court was for her the mere travesty of her nobler dreams. Yet the men and women who had known her persisted in recalling only such successes as these.

In the rush and tear of her existence in the smart social life of her time, she took refuge constantly in the calmer air of her own thoughts, where she breathed the atmosphere of great ideas; and she persistently sought to realise those ideas with the co-operation of men whom she esteemed. What, however, had come of it all? Who remembered or judged her at her worth?

The Countess de Castiglione readily magnified the part she had played. An extravagant phrase, often on her lips, was: "*I made Italy and saved the Papacy.*" Certain it is that in the secret negotiations carried on between Paris and Turin she served as an active intermediary, who had received her information from a very high source. There is no doubt also that she was most zealous in the service of Cavour; that she spurred on the French Emperor's resolution to intervene, with arms, in the affairs of Italy. It is also the fact that, in quite other circumstances, she was astutely instrumental in keeping the Pope in Rome, and that she was especially delegated to Pius IX. by Victor-Emmanuel, to convey certain promises and offers that were most conciliatory.¹

Being in high favour both at the Tuileries and the Court of Piedmont, she was in an excellent position to exercise considerable influence. Moreover, her husband, the Count de Castiglione, happened to be the best of auxiliaries, thanks to his daily contact with

¹ As I have already mentioned in the *Femmes du Second Empire*, the Countess delighted to show the bracelet that, on her return, was given her by the Sovereign Pontiff, with the tiara crowning the jewel.

Victor-Emmanuel. Thus it was through him and the Countess that the extra-official despatches in cipher were exchanged between the sovereigns, and she was always fond of recalling this fact. She was able at the time to dispense with ambassadors; to correspond, go and come, even negotiate, within certain limits, without their permission. She was in a position to make light of the diplomatic protocol. There was, to be sure, the risk of wounding the vanity of the great and of making them her enemies. Many a diplomatic communication, many a verbal treaty was entrusted to the Count and Countess. They met at the frontier, in the snow and tempests of Mont-Cenis. Imbued, both of them, with a sense of their political responsibilities, they lost no time recalling their former honeymoon, but after a speedy exchange of their precious communications they took quick leave of each other. Why wonder if she felt some conceit at being charged with such a task? How, in fact, could she help experiencing a touch of pride? She was not yet twenty!

After the Countess's death, the Italian Embassy ordered her papers to be seized in order to suppress these strange and positive details, and they would still remain unknown if we had not before our eyes, in her letters, conclusive evidence with regard to them.

"All this and, owing to me, Cavour's admittance to the Congress of Paris—all this," she says word for word, "is history and not mere complacent feminine tittle-tattle."

She had accumulated her proofs, in the form of royal autographs or letters in cipher, emanating from those who believed in her, and containing, without any peradventure or circumlocution, either their instructions or the expression of their thanks. She had especially

preserved with the greatest care the original text of the famous despatch which, when it reached the Emperor, so filled him with alarm : "*The Austrians have crossed the Tessin, save the capital!*" On the spot Napoleon had summoned Canrobert for orders, and the campaign was begun.

These were the glorious days when her dreams had really been converted into action. A close relative of Cavour's, proud to belong to his school ; speaking several languages ; exceedingly well informed in political matters, and, like a true Florentine, fond of politics, she had instinctively assimilated, with her woman's temperament, the methods of diplomacy.

No doubt she was too impulsive by temperament to take a very sharp and circumspect view of a situation. There are three forms of discipline and constraint which the impetuous soul of a woman in politics can hardly endure, namely, to reflect, to compare, to wait. But Mme. de Castiglione's brain often emitted brilliantly illuminating sparks, judicious perceptions and intuitions with regard to the present and the future of the European nations then engaged in a common struggle. And she had furthermore the very rare satisfaction of appearing to be of all people the best informed as to what was being done and discussed in the capitals of Turin, Vienna, Madrid, London, and sometimes Berlin. She seemed to have the profoundest knowledge of the actions and the manner of life, not to say the loves, of princes and kings.

I have told what new fields of further secret activity opened up to her imagination after the overthrow of the Empire. No doubt she readily exaggerated the assistance which she had given to French diplomacy. Certainly she failed to change the course of events or to

alter the terms of treaties ; but by her semi-official intervention, which was appreciated in Florence and Berlin, she was able to remove certain causes of friction and to facilitate certain very difficult negotiations. A part of the preliminary negotiations, which led Jules Favre and Thiers to debate with the conqueror the conditions of peace, took place through her and the French legation at Florence.

After that came the third phase of her mysterious activity, a phase of which the public had no inkling, when, from 1871 to 1877, she urged the Duke d'Aumale to usurp a dictatorship—it being her conviction that he had only to stretch out his hand for it—and when she undertook, with violent energy, to touch a thousand springs in order to stimulate the Princes' apathy and the lofty indifference of the pretenders. In vain did she and others urge them to seize the opportunities, which were presented to them at least three times, for the restoration of the monarchy in France. She wasted her efforts to no purpose ; no one listened to her song.

Just as little was she heeded a few years later by her king, the King of Italy, when she earnestly advised him not to expose his dynasty to a disaster like that of Sedan, but to abdicate sooner than risk his life and crown in the political game of Crispi. Already she had caught premonitory whiffs of the storm that she felt was approaching, and she had foretold to Humbert the fate in store for him :

“ You will get yourself driven out of the country,” she boldly wrote him, “ hung in effigy, and perhaps assassinated—you and yours ! ”

Why did not this headstrong ruler yield to the omnipotence of facts ? Was he waiting for a revolution before acknowledging them ?

"Prudence dictates following the course of the sister-nations," added the prophetess, though her mind was but little attuned to the republican ideal; "this will mean peace for Europe, and Germany will remain alone to bear the weight of her crown, now gone out of fashion."¹ The Italian dynasty was to escape the disaster of a revolution, but Humbert paid for the mistakes of his policy with his blood.

Thus, she who was always depicted as a kind of frivolous Court doll, did not reason so foolishly. Her intelligence was haunted by luminous presentiments. She had a clear vision of an Italy that had shaken off the Roman traditions, and, lightened of the ballast of pontifical sovereignty, had risen to the level of the great military monarchies of Europe. She refrained from fixing the date, but she faced the fatal moment when Rome would definitely cast off the theocratic yoke, when the spiritual Cæsar of past ages would have to resign himself to surrendering his Papal Guard and his vested courtiers, make up his mind no longer to hold a Court, and divest himself of the last semblance of his ancient temporal power.

Alas! who was aware of what she was saying? Who heeded her? She was but a supernumerary, without a stage, without a voice, making gestures in the dark. Torn by contrary impulses she had lavishly spent herself, without being allowed to give her activity a straight undeviating course. In the thick of the party struggles in France, she urged the Duke d'Aumale to dash into the arena; she roused the over-disciplined zeal of the Duke de Chartres; and she exhausted her energy in seeking

¹ Letter dcix.

to galvanise the procrastinating spirit of the Count de Paris, in order, at least, to wrest from him one single word and to make him show himself a Philippe VII.

Her ideas, her dreams, her endeavours, all the multiple manifestations of her activity and of her fiery initiative, had whirled, as it were, through space, only to fall again to the ground and become as the dust of the highway. No lustre had been reflected on her name, nor had she been the object of personal or public gratitude in any form. Her efforts in the training of princes had by no means entailed for her the brilliant results she had expected. She had been pursuing a will-o'-the-wisp of her imagination and desire. She could not bear without bitterness the mortification of feeling that she—all the qualities of her heart and intelligence—had been at last forsaken.¹

Thereupon, that grievous condition of soul took possession of her, in which all human beings, whatever their outward trappings or dignities, appear shrunken, both morally and physically. Her political failures greatly contributed to tighten the circle of melancholy that hemmed her in, and to which she had gradually been driven by her premature disgust of a world which she had approached too young. Add to this the loss of her son George,² a charming creature and the only being whom she had ever really loved; and finally, a

¹ "By force of jostling and *thouing* princes one learns how to live and die without them" (Letter cxxii.).

² The fruit of a belated love, however, as was curiously revealed to me by Don Alessandro Litta-Madignani (Henry Prior, *Private Letter*, April 10, 1912)—a relative of Clement Verasis. When her son was over twelve years old, the Countess kept him out of her sight because he made her appear old. She dressed him like a groom, and kept him in the ante-room with her servants. One fine day he left the maternal dwelling and took refuge with his uncle Clement, who was a brother of his father and who brought up Georges de Castiglione, helped him on to a diplomatic career, and married him to a San-Marzano.

consideration of no less importance, the inevitable distress of a supremely beautiful woman, witnessing the slow decay of her charms.

Many years had elapsed since the day when she sighed: "I have had only a rapid run through life and my dream is ended."

For her consolation she had neither the recollection of a deep sentiment that had satisfied the longings of her heart, nor the comforts of religion.

It has been said of love, of real love, that its visit is often late, and that in this it resembles religious devotion. As religious grace, which has its roots in the altar, or in the boredom of living, or in the dread of the unknown beyond the grave, had not touched Mme. de Castiglione, she might have shown herself more sensitive to a return of real passion. But this dream came to her too late; besides, she had within her no set of ideas or principles, nothing capable of acting as a check when she was carried away by her rage against the injustice of fate. The world, passion, medicine, religion: on all these subjects she was an atheist, or virtually an atheist. She had inherited a certain fund of superstition, but one would have tried in vain to obtain from her any expression of religious belief. A misty deism, which she made no attempt to account for, was the sole foundation of her religion. As is the case with the majority of Italians, the catholicism of her youth had been merely an outer garment. It had formed part of the education of her eyes, like the beauty of the sky or of her country's monuments. There was in her nothing of a mystic. The occasions in her subsequent life when she made use of a priest were few

indeed; and finally, in fact, she grew to detest the devout and to hate the "priestlings." Starving for the love of her kind, dying of an abandonment, a loneliness, which she herself had nevertheless created, she ended by leading a most singular existence, a life strangely disorganised, without the solace of husband, of child, or of lover.¹

Need we, then, be surprised if towards the end her reason suffered a painful eclipse?

We have seen how she betrayed all the symptoms of the slow invasion of melancholia in a disordered mind. She fled from the daylight just as she deliberately withdrew from the sight of her kind. Doubt and distrust dogged her steps like a shadow; she imagined herself surrounded by treasons and to be walking amid pitfalls. The sun's rays shocked her clear eye; and she therefore exacted that her room be kept in perpetual darkness. She never went out of her voluntary prison except during the hours when she was nearly sure of meeting no one in the Paris streets.

This cloistral existence was as injurious to her physical being as to her mental balance; for it was not the refreshing and healthful solitude of life in the open air which revives the jaded senses by fresh impressions. Many thinkers have observed that nothing is more harmful to soul and body than constantly harping on the same train of thought, allowing the mind, as it were, to stagnate, and permitting one's fixed ideas to fester. Inevitably the brain becomes exhausted or irritated by the ceaseless return to the same object, by the constant

¹ "I might have, and ought to have, had more children. That is my greatest blunder" (Letter cclxii).

lifting of the same load, by the unremittingly futile pursuit of the same phantoms. Now if, as Dr. Zimmermann considered, a woman's imagination is more easily stirred than a man's, she is also more exposed to pathologic cerebral affections when uninterruptedly alone and leading a very retired life.

The Countess de Castiglione did nothing by halves. Her withdrawal, in time, from human society would not have been an error, if she had adopted this attitude in order to secure greater independence, and to allay, in the calmness of solitude, her regrets for what had been and what could never be resuscitated. But she had immersed herself entirely, with a kind of fanaticism, in absolute retirement, and this was a solution as perilous as it was fantastic. She paid for it cruelly. Her health, which was already bad, declined rapidly and dangerously. She was ill in body and also seriously ill in mind, if not even in heart. Her mental anguish would have been complete if she had not preserved to the last, as a supreme resource, an excellent memory.

Mme. de Castiglione was alive to kindness in others rather than thoroughly good-hearted herself; she was quick to kindle in one sense or another, but she was above all irritable and combative, independent and proud; disinterested¹ without being generous; extreme in every respect, and disliking to put upon herself any kind of restraint. She had always practised very indifferently the art and pleasure of receiving. She retained her habitual guests, but stripped of all her

¹ "I have never bowed down to the power of money, preferring to deprive myself of every comfort and necessity, always proud and stubborn even when I did not possess what I now have, namely, the Alboni legacy that fell down from heaven twenty years too late" (Letter cxi.).

illusions, cherishing a melancholy that all but verged on the bitterest despair, she had at the end little confidence in anybody or anything. She made an exception in favour of only a very small number, to whom she dedicated a real sentiment of friendship,¹ and she had known how to preserve, unbroken, certain ties, certain affectionate relations. These few friends consoled and calmed her to the end of her days when she was no longer in complete possession either of her faculties or her reason. And thus, owing to these friendships, her short, strange destiny was permitted to end in a shadow that was rendered a little less tragic.

In her dreams the Countess de Castiglione had conceived the most magnificent projects: to carry them out, to crown her hopes the right man had failed her. Although she tried to mitigate these defeats by the thought that she always remained *she* and owed nothing to others, yet she had the sorrowful consciousness of having lived an unsuccessful life. Trusting in the power of her own personality, she had had but one single desire in this world: the unfulfilled desire of dominating, protecting, playing a rôle which should quench her thirst for life, for action of the richest and largest kind.²

¹ My great merit is (and it has always been the reason of my retaining my most intimate friends and attachments), never to advance or retreat without cause, but, keeping in the shadow and silence, to come at the signal" (Letter ccxxii.).

² Here is a singular thing: a German authoress, a talented novelist and trained graphologist, to whom I sent some of Mme. de Castiglione's letters, at once recognised these characteristic indications of her moral nature in her handwriting. "The capital letters are enormous, too large for the line, the typical handwriting of those who dream of accomplishing something extraordinary. It resembles that of Lady Hamilton (published in the work of Volrat Schumacher) and that of Louis XIV. It marks a spirit of enterprise, an impetuous desire to rule and to protect. One feels she is a born queen—according to her faculties and tastes. It is a woman ready always to distribute her great wealth of ideas. If you look with the eye of the graphologist at these imperious characters that require a whole page for a few

Always her life was agitated either by ambition or regret. Certain pettinesses, obscurities, vulgarities belittled this figure so full of enthusiasm and of fantasy. One would like to forget them, or remember them only for the sake of the oddity of the details, or for the glaring originality of the contrasts they present. For at all times she gave evidence of a soul naturally lofty and free, manifesting its distinction and its superiority by an outer demeanour which was haughty and sometimes hard. Such a bearing militated against her own happiness ; but there she entrenched herself, intentionally and wilfully : and that is the reason why this woman, who had been so greatly admired, was so little loved, although she had been so made for love.

words, you say to yourself directly : It is a commanding soul. A certain hypnotised subject formed such letters. (Dr. Ludwig Klages, *Figurenbuch*, 37.) He was made to suppose himself Napoleon, and that he had to call up the troops. Then, being suggestionised, he wrote in a hand different from his usual hand, and resembling that of Mme. de Castiglione. This is a curious psychological comparison, for she, too, seemed to be hypnotised by her ambition. Her plans and ideas filled her brain, and it was through the force of her desire, by the impulsion of her imagination and her ambition, that she elevated as it were her natural abilities" (Letter from Mme. Rosa Austerlitz to the author, March 26, 1912).

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